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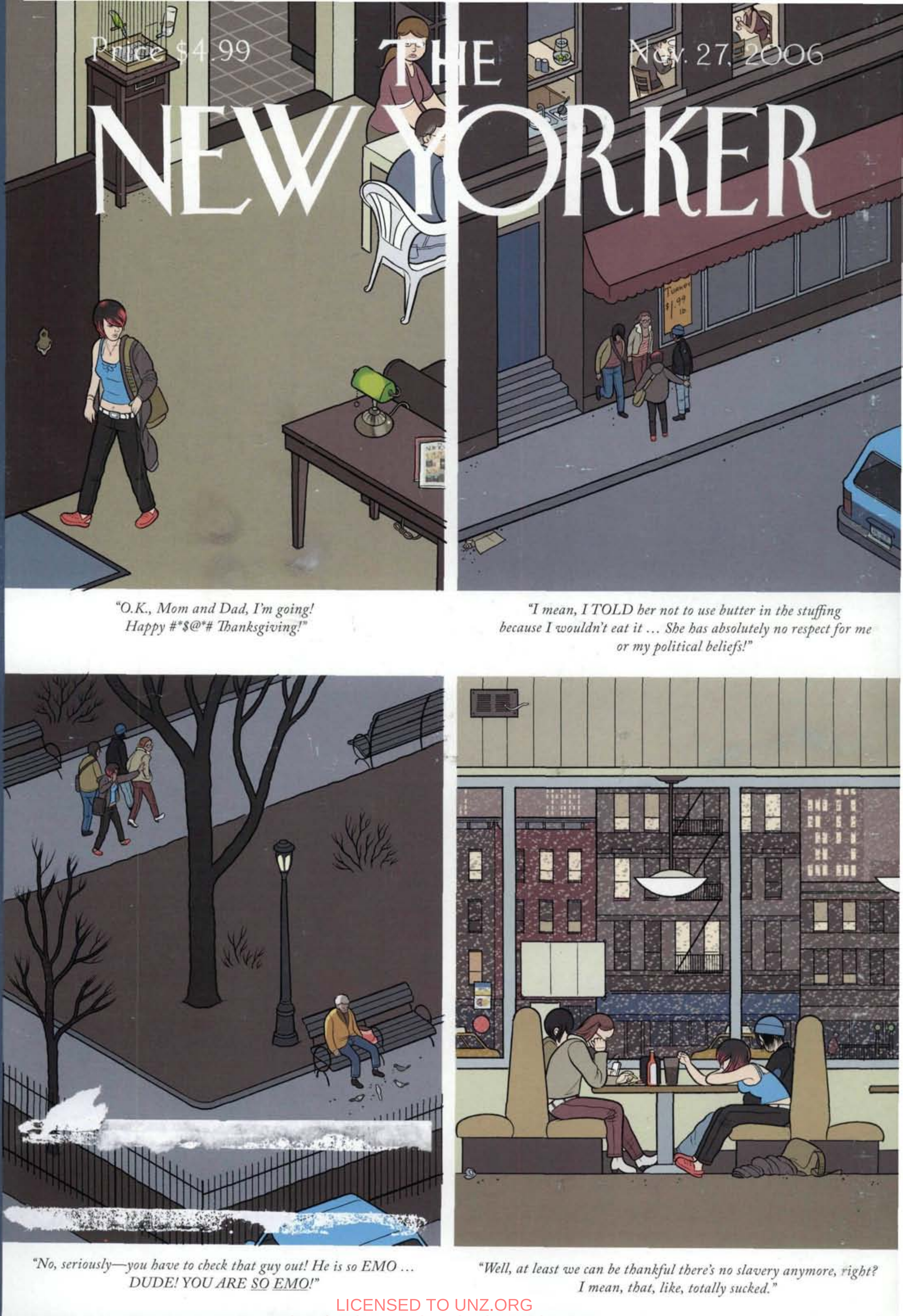
Nov. 27, 2006

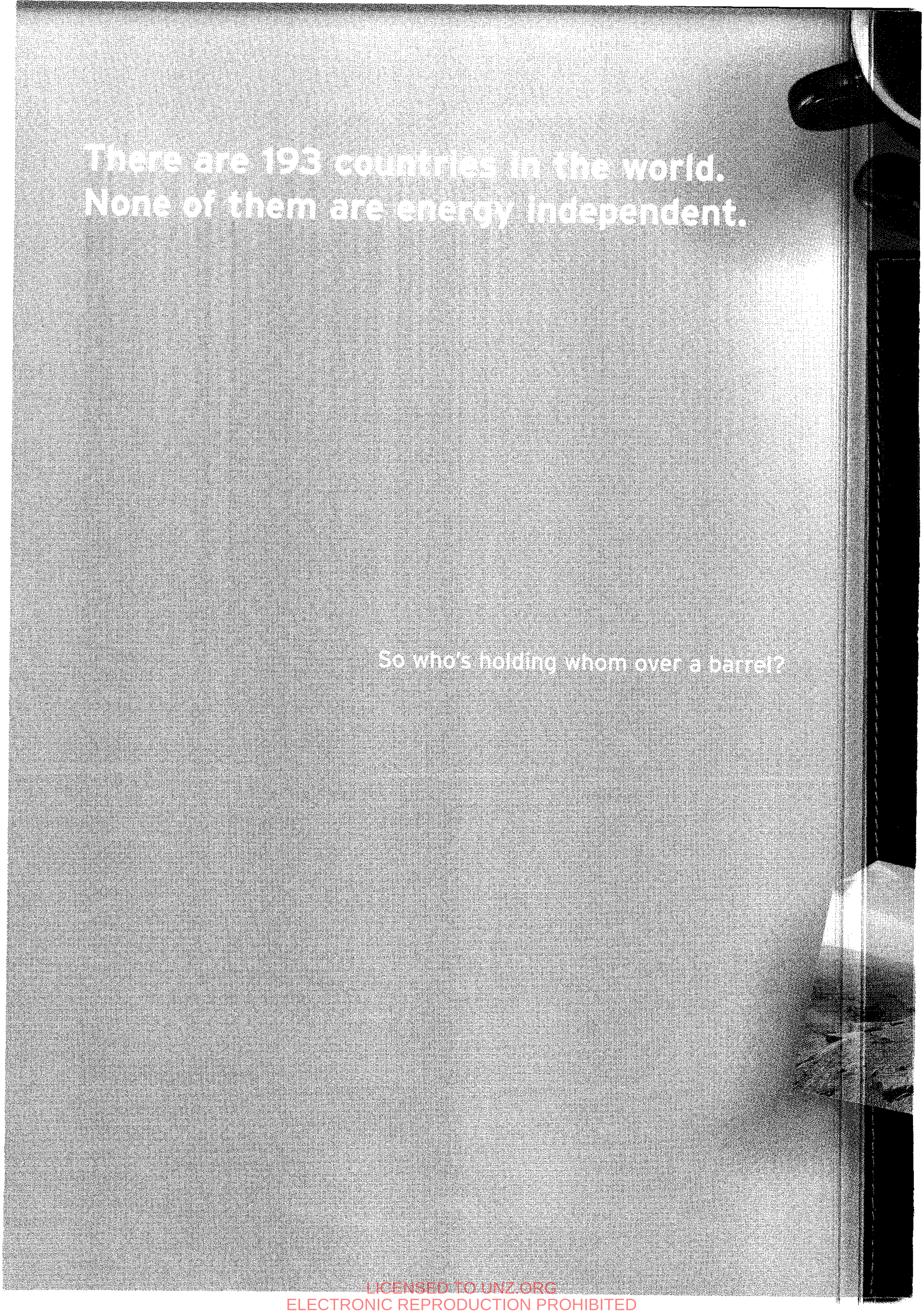


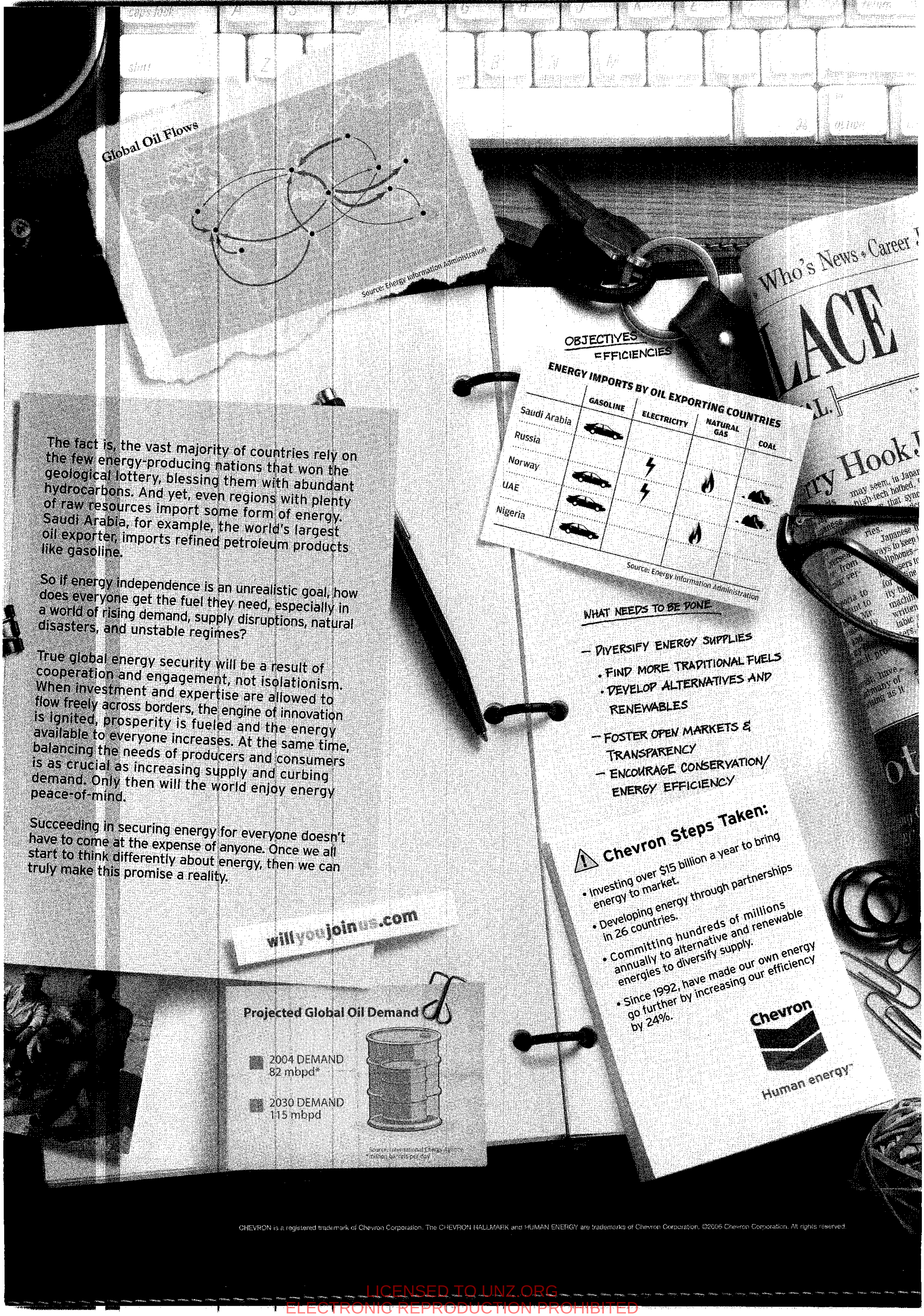
"O.K., Mom and Dad, I'm going! Happy #$@*# Thanksgiving!"*

"I mean, I TOLD her not to use butter in the stuffing because I wouldn't eat it ... She has absolutely no respect for me or my political beliefs!"

"No, seriously—you have to check that guy out! He is so EMO ... DUDE! YOU ARE SO EMO!"

"Well, at least we can be thankful there's no slavery anymore, right? I mean, that, like, totally sucked."


There are 193 countries in the world.
None of them are energy independent.
So who's holding whom over a barrel?



The fact is, the vast majority of countries rely on the few energy-producing nations that won the geological lottery, blessing them with abundant hydrocarbons. And yet, even regions with plenty of raw resources import some form of energy. Saudi Arabia, for example, the world's largest oil exporter, imports refined petroleum products like gasoline.

So if energy independence is an unrealistic goal, how does everyone get the fuel they need, especially in a world of rising demand, supply disruptions, natural disasters, and unstable regimes?

True global energy security will be a result of cooperation and engagement, not isolationism. When investment and expertise are allowed to flow freely across borders, the engine of innovation is ignited, prosperity is fueled and the energy available to everyone increases. At the same time, balancing the needs of producers and consumers is as crucial as increasing supply and curbing demand. Only then will the world enjoy energy peace-of-mind.

Succeeding in securing energy for everyone doesn't have to come at the expense of anyone. Once we all start to think differently about energy, then we can truly make this promise a reality.

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OBJECTIVES
EFFICIENCIES

ENERGY IMPORTS BY OIL EXPORTING COUNTRIES

	GASOLINE	ELECTRICITY	NATURAL GAS	COAL
Saudi Arabia	✓			
Russia				
Norway	✓	✓	✓	✓
UAE	✓	✓		✓
Nigeria	✓		✓	

Source: Energy Information Administration

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

- DIVERSIFY ENERGY SUPPLIES
  - FIND MORE TRADITIONAL FUELS
  - DEVELOP ALTERNATIVES AND RENEWABLES
- FOSTER OPEN MARKETS & TRANSPARENCY
- ENCOURAGE CONSERVATION/ENERGY EFFICIENCY

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Projected Global Oil Demand

▨ 2004 DEMAND 82 mbpd*
▨ 2030 DEMAND 115 mbpd

Source: International Energy Agency
*million barrels per day

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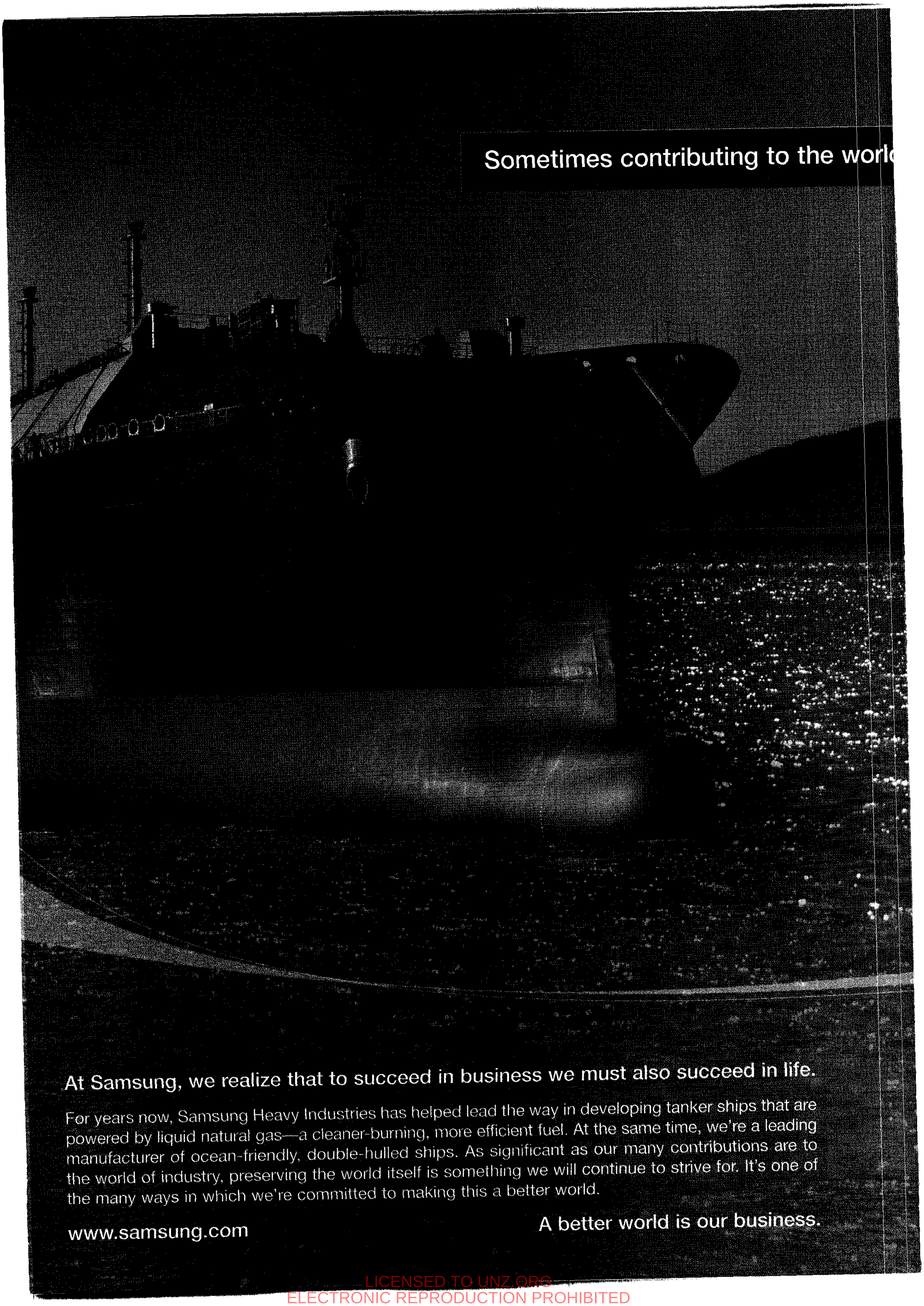

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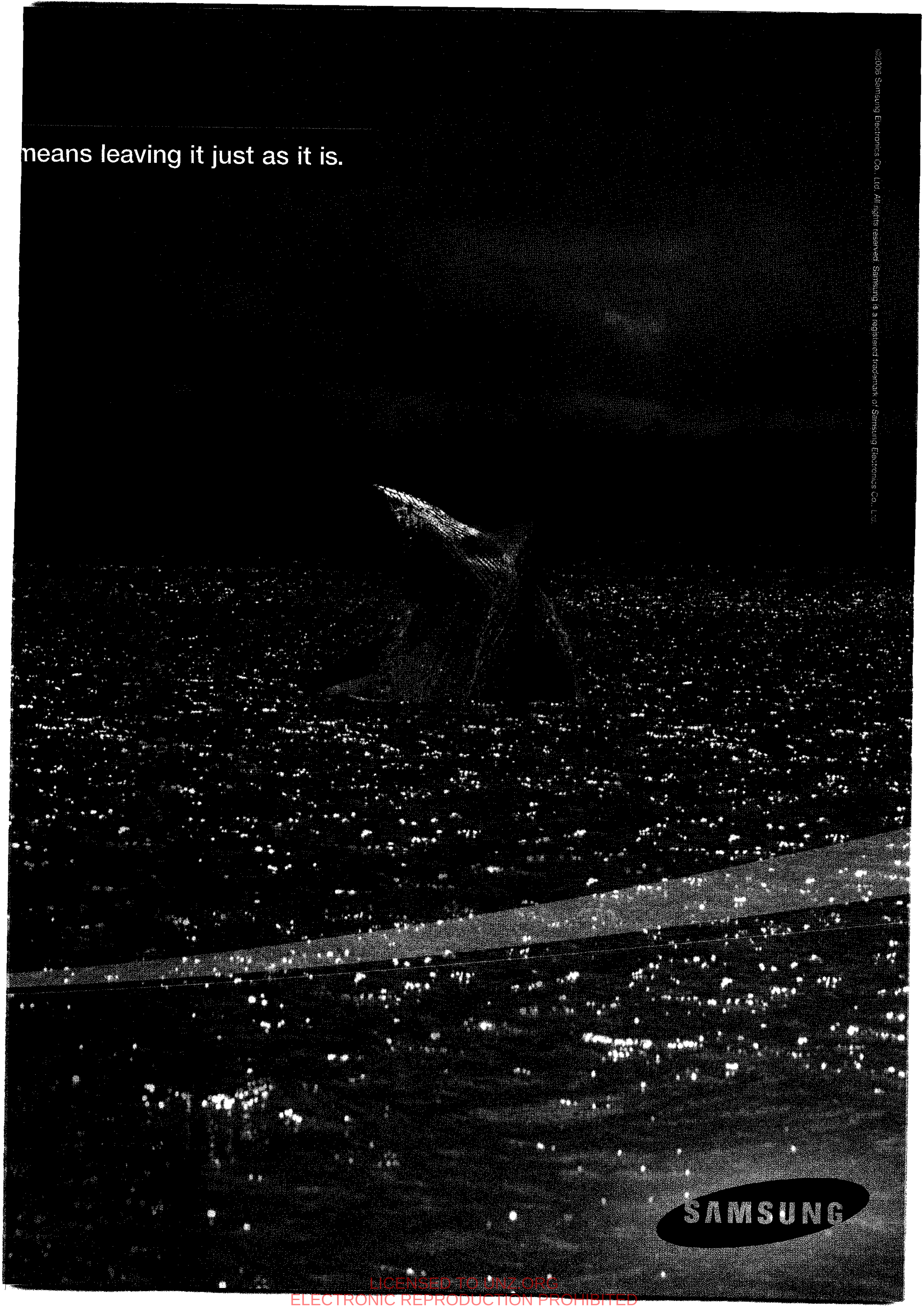
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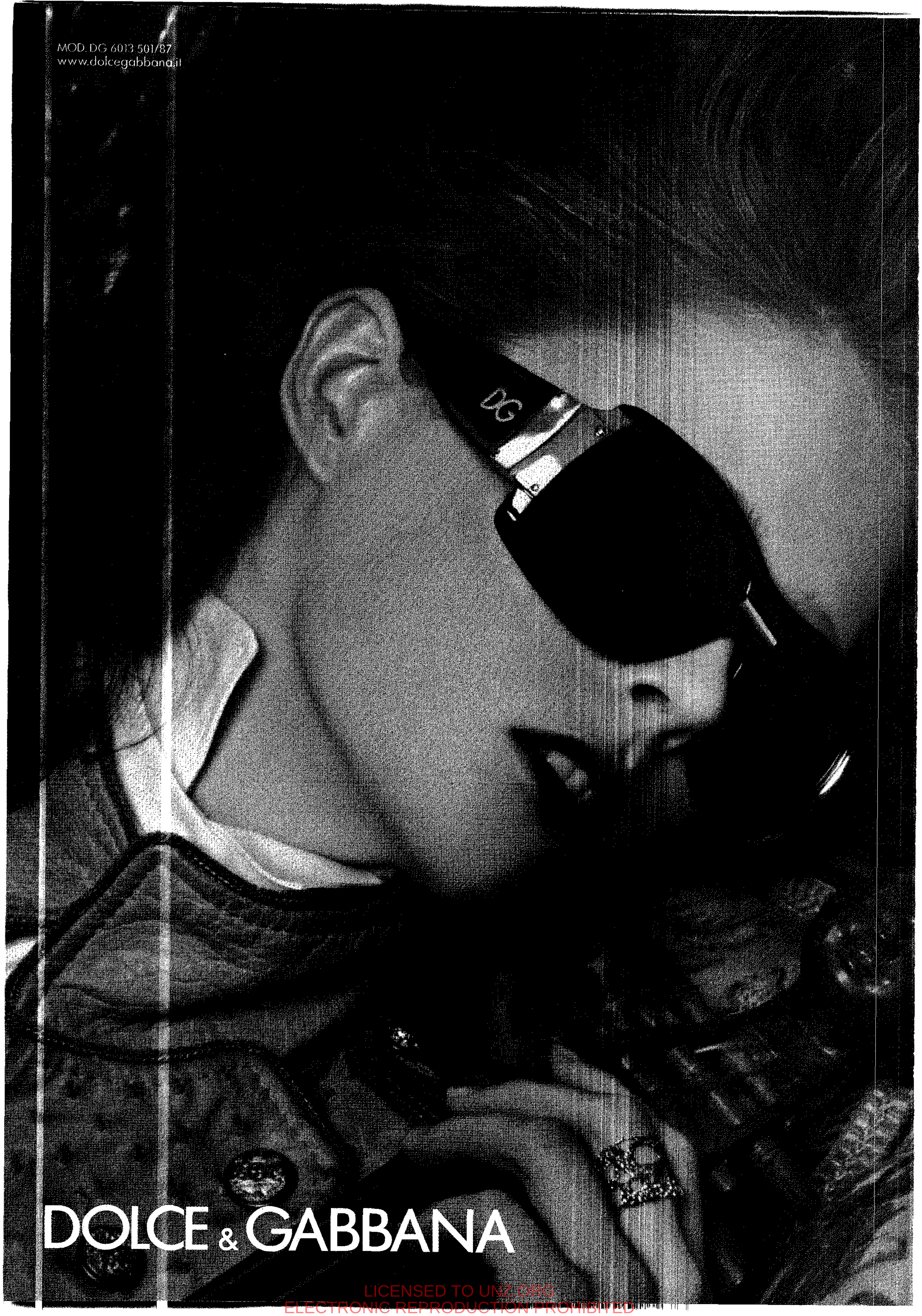
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THE NEW YORKER
THE CARTOON ISSUE

NOVEMBER 27, 2006

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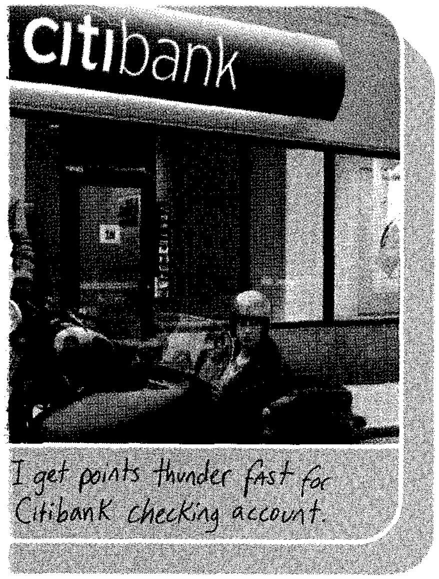

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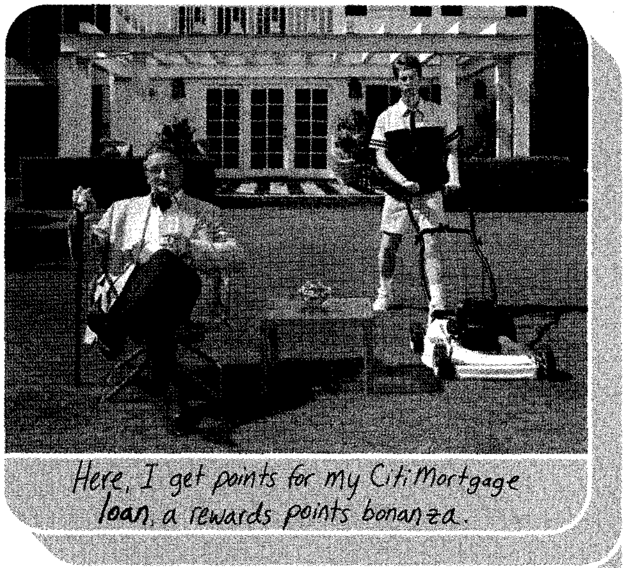

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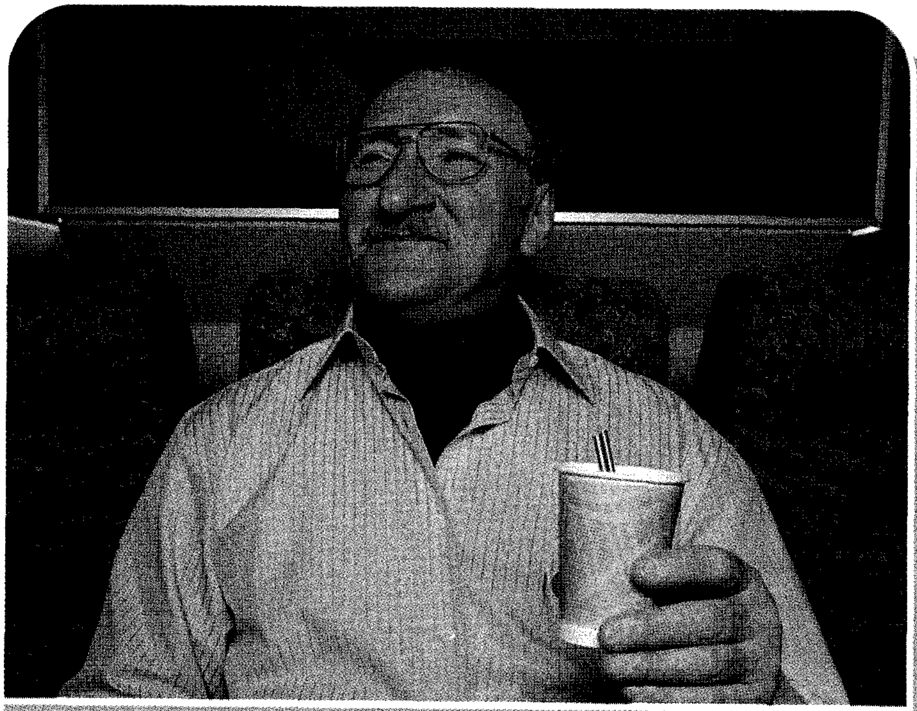

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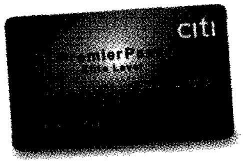

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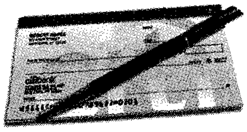

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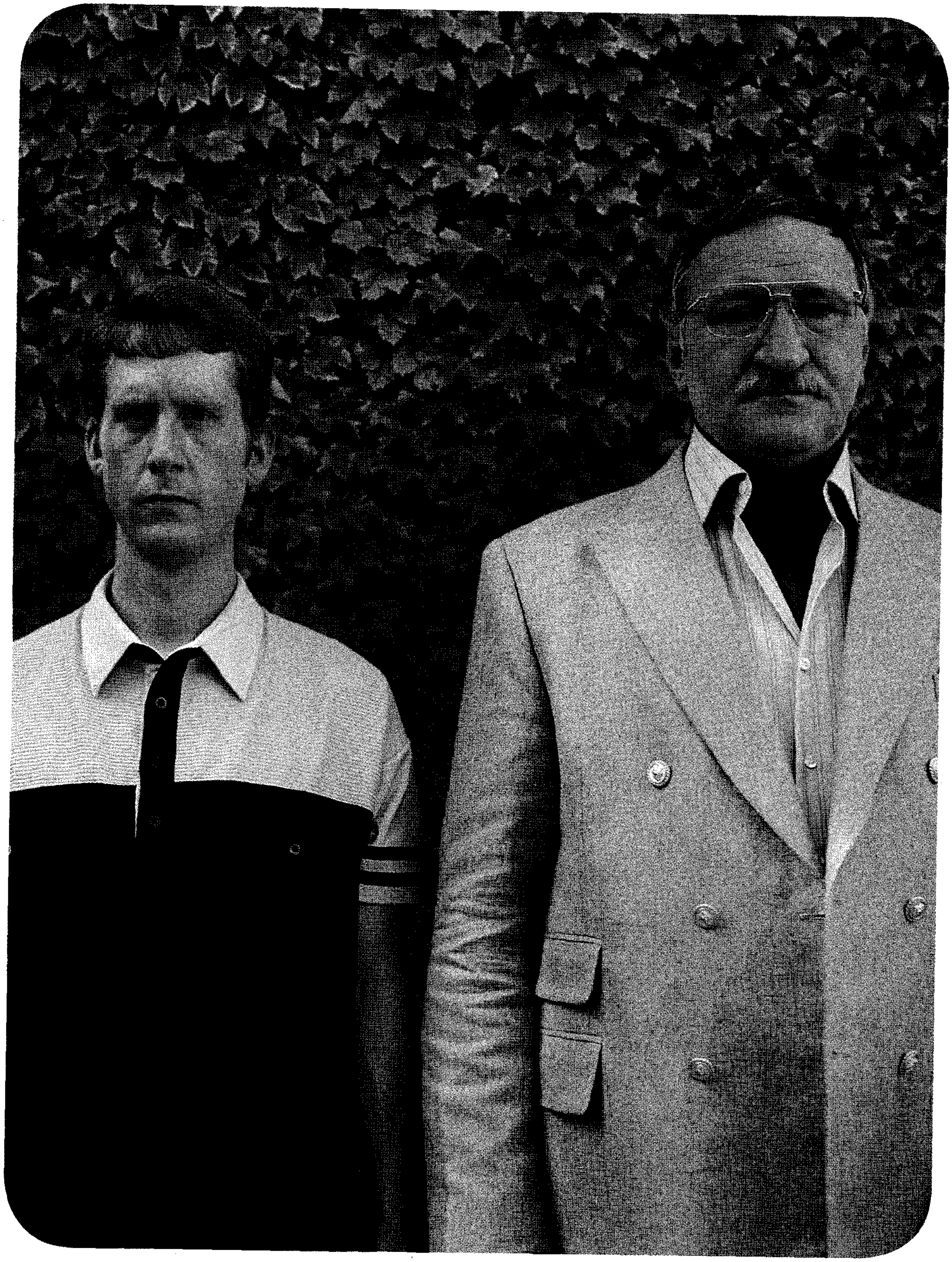

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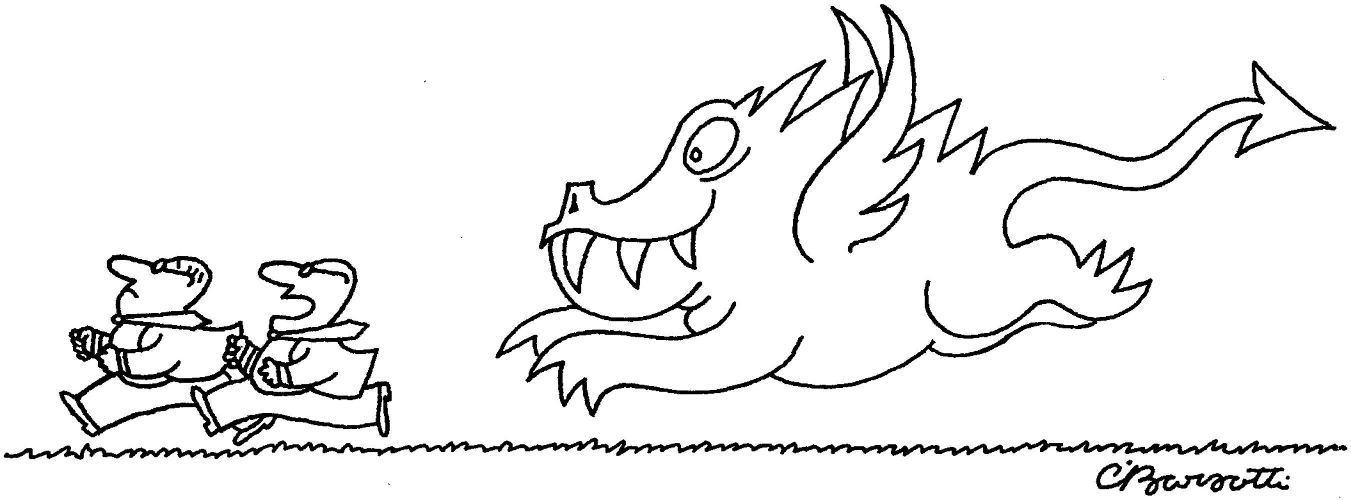

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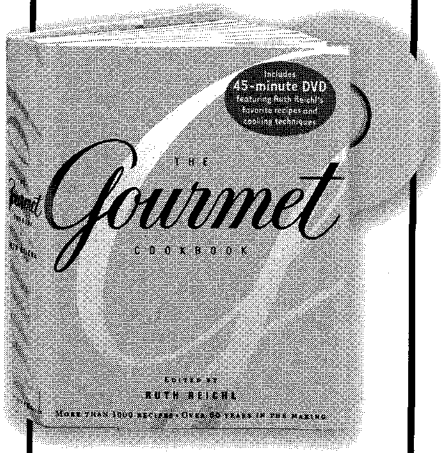
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CONTRIBUTORS

Seymour M. Hersh ("The Next Act," p. 94) is the author of "Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib," which is out in paperback.

Roger Angell ("Cardinals Rule," p. 112) has written seven books on baseball, including "Game Time." His book of memoirs, "Let Me Finish," was published in May.

Nicholas Lemann ("The Weekly Warrior," p. 126), a staff writer, is the dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

William Steig (Spots), who died in 2003, contributed covers and cartoons to the magazine for more than seven decades. His book "When Everybody Wore a Hat," published in April, 2003, depicts scenes from his childhood.

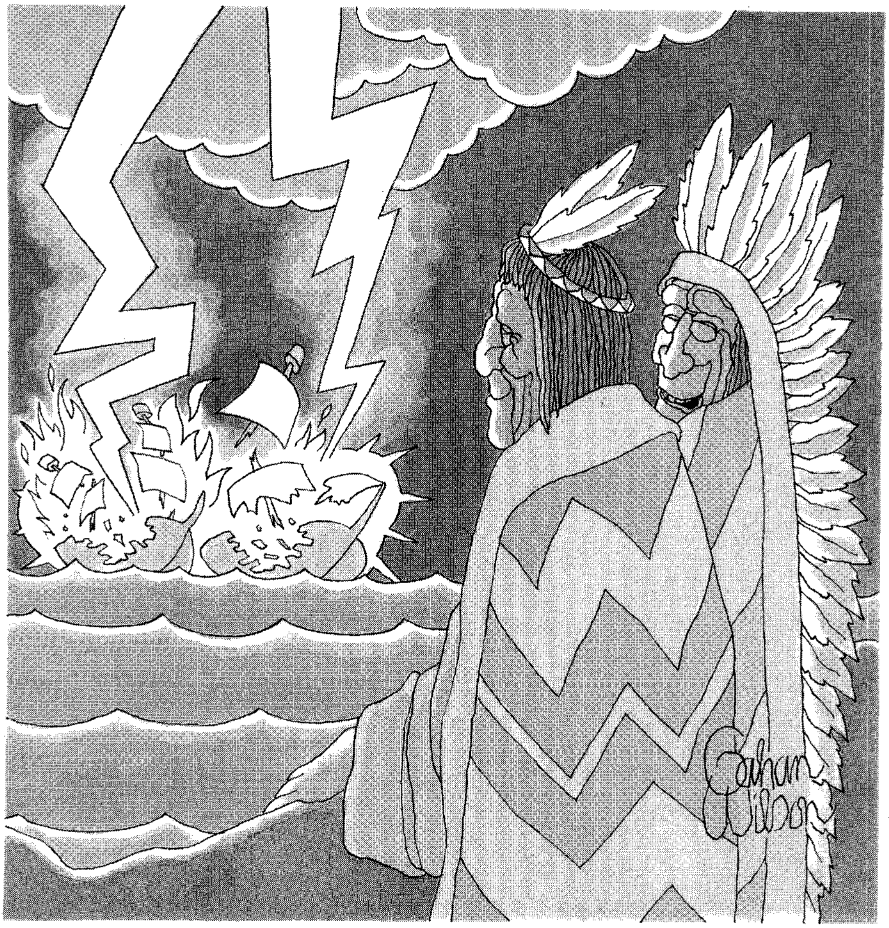
Leo Cullum (Sketchbook, p. 162), a retired airplane pilot, has published three collections of cartoons, including "Tequila Mockingbird."

Roz Chast ("Turning Japanese," p. 166) is the author of "Theories of Everything," a collection of her cartoons from 1978 to 2006.

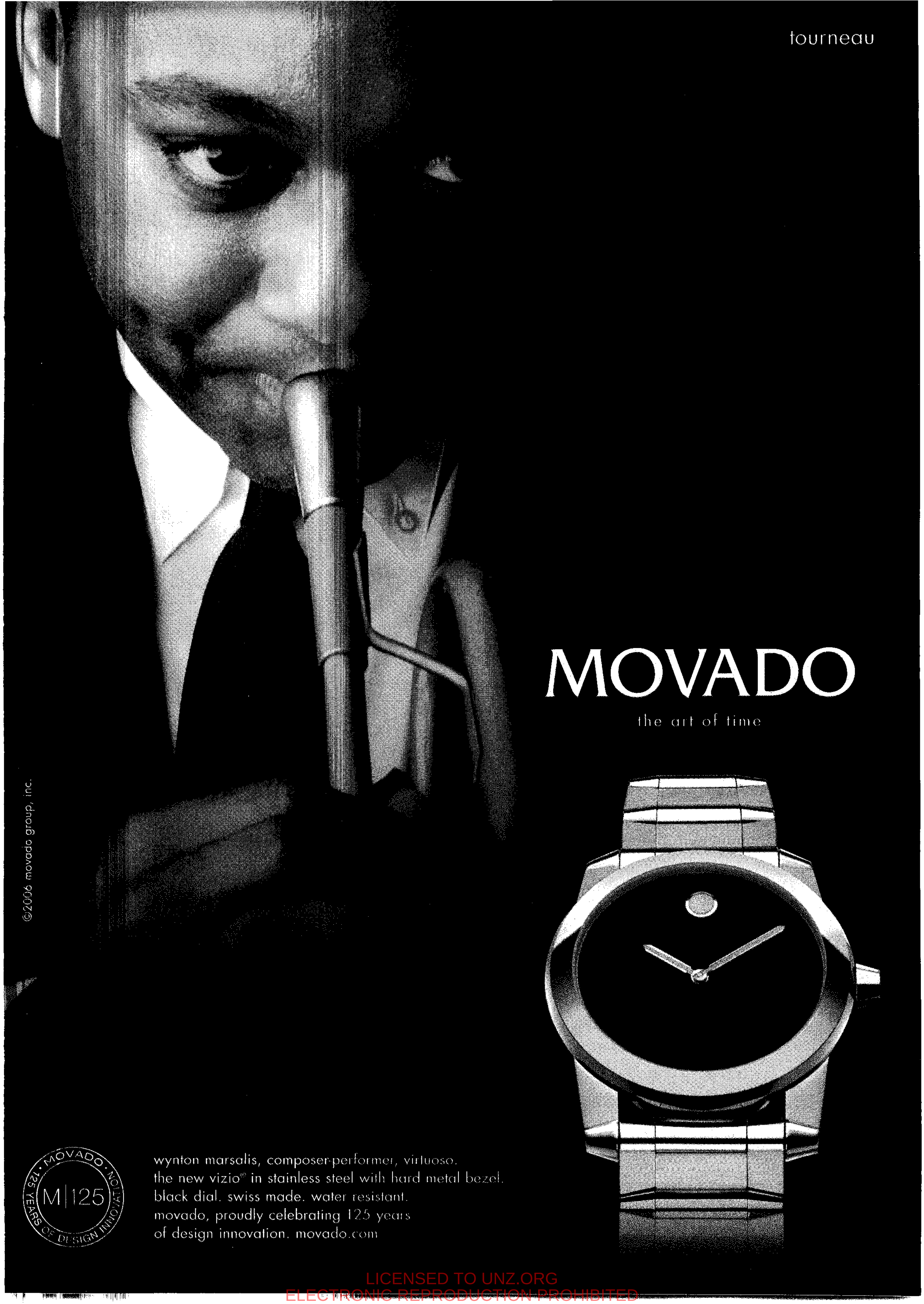
Matthew Diffee ("Guide to City Birds," p. 168) edited "The Rejection Collection: Cartoons You Never Saw, and Never Will See, in *The New Yorker*."

Louis Menand (Books, p. 170) received a Pulitzer Prize for his book "The Metaphysical Club."

Adam Gopnik (A Critic at Large, p. 174) is the author of "Through the Children's Gate: A Home in New York."


Gahan Wilson

"Henceforth, let us set aside this date as a day of thanksgiving!"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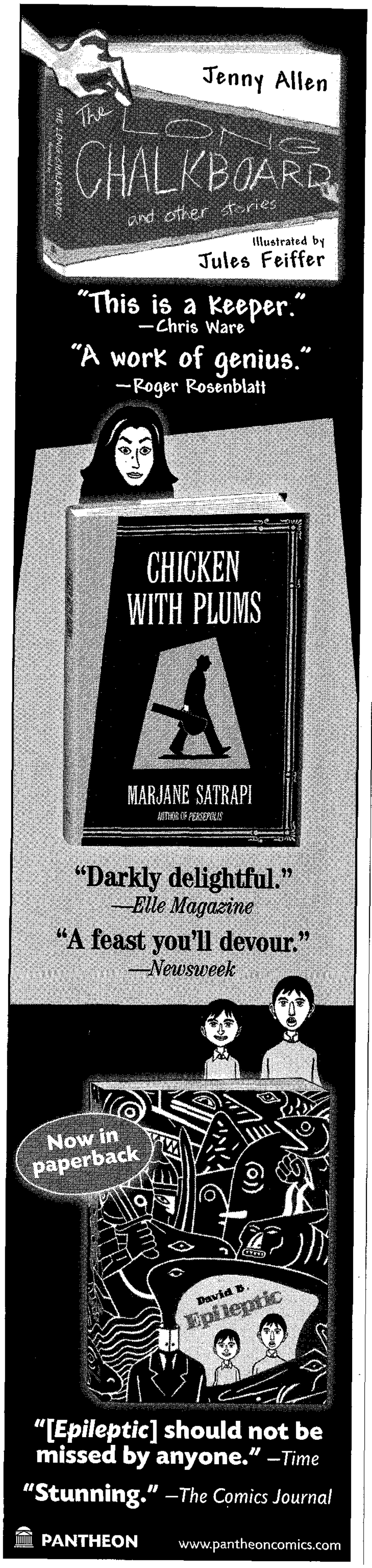
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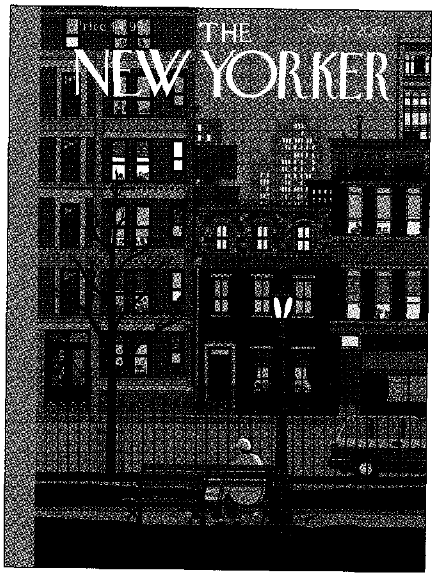
Chris Ware (Covers) is a cartoonist and graphic novelist. This week's cover is a work in five parts, with a Thanksgiving theme. Four of the parts are magazine covers, and the fifth is a comic strip. Subscribers will receive one of the four covers; all the cover images, as well as the comic strip, will be on our Web site, at www.newyorker.com. Ware is working on two graphic novels, "Rusty Brown" and "Building Stories." The seventeenth issue of his comic book "The ACME Novelty Library" comes out later this month.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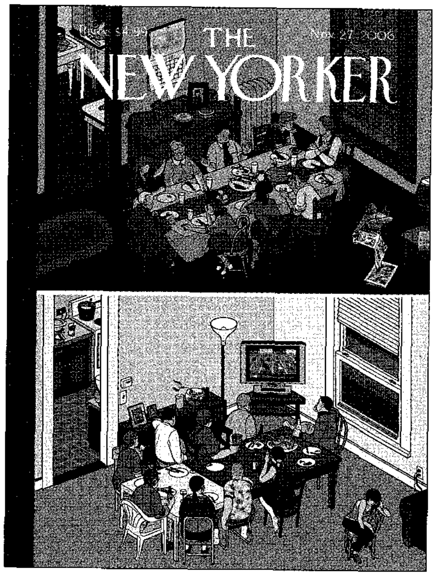
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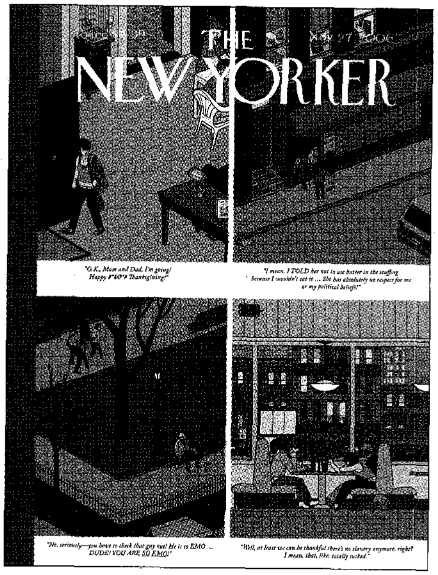
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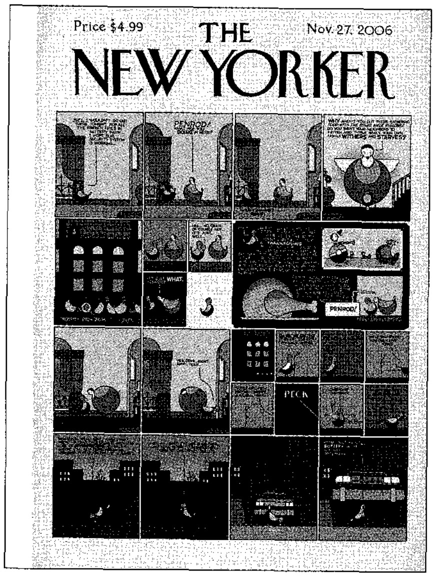
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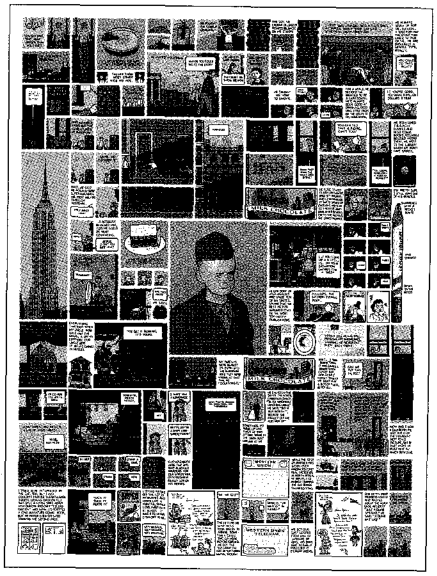

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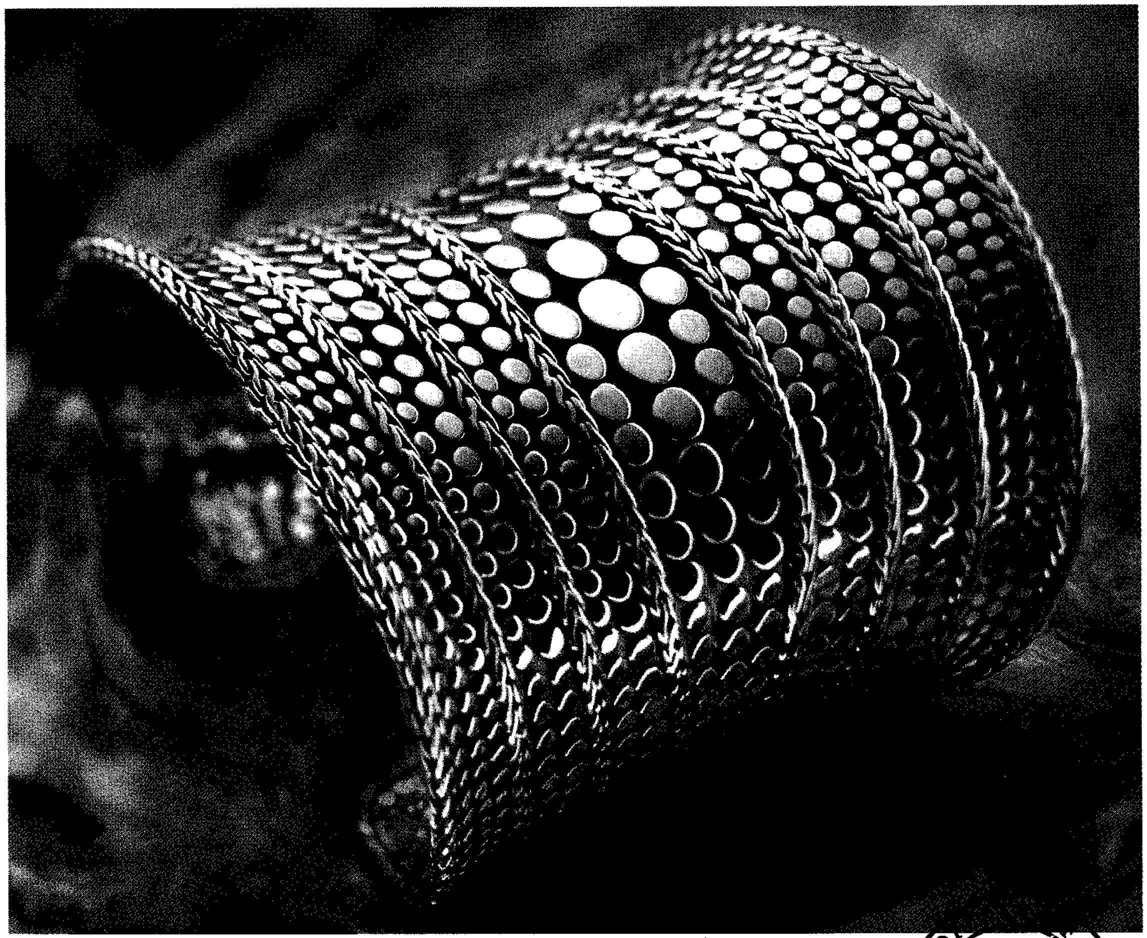

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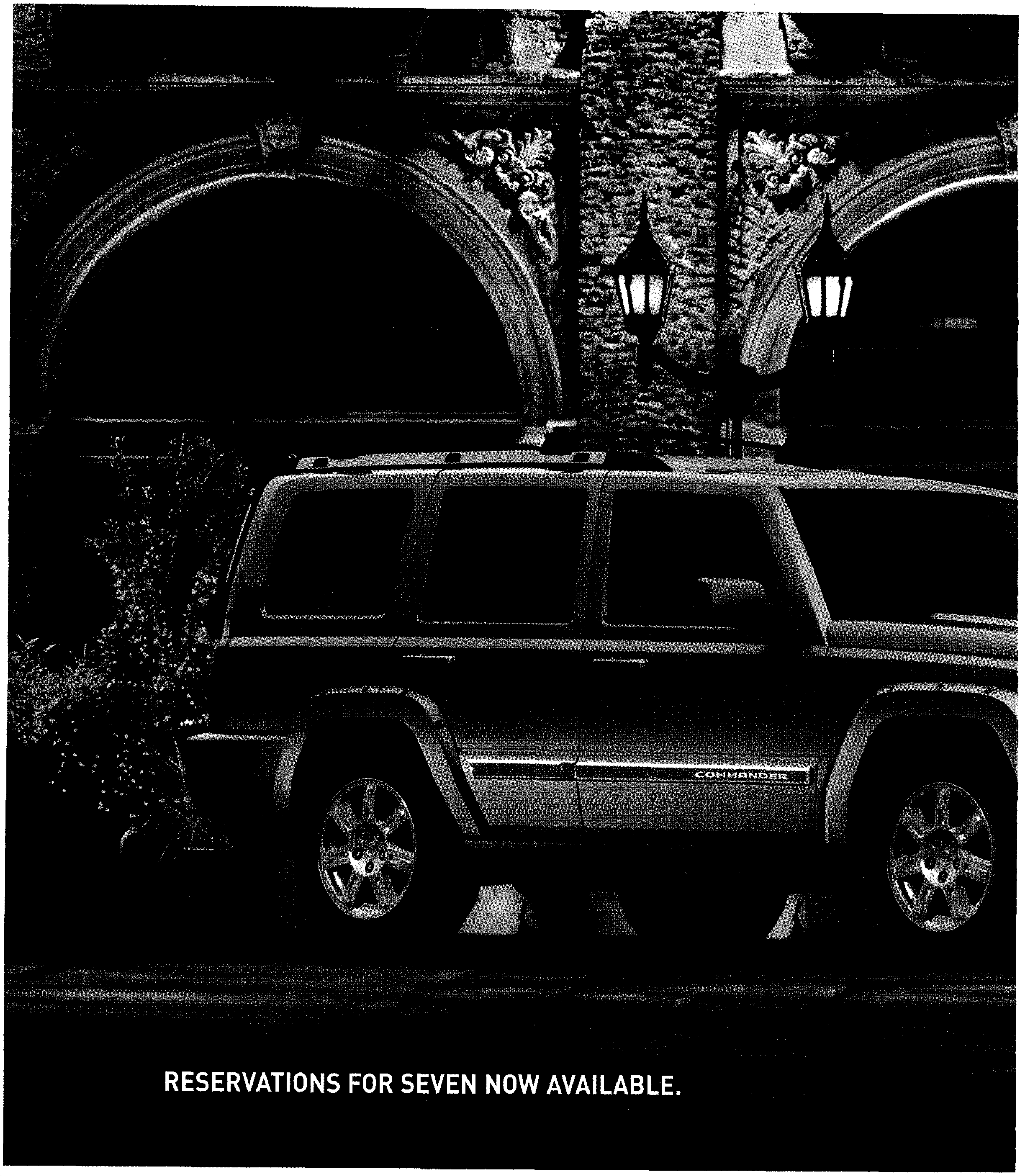
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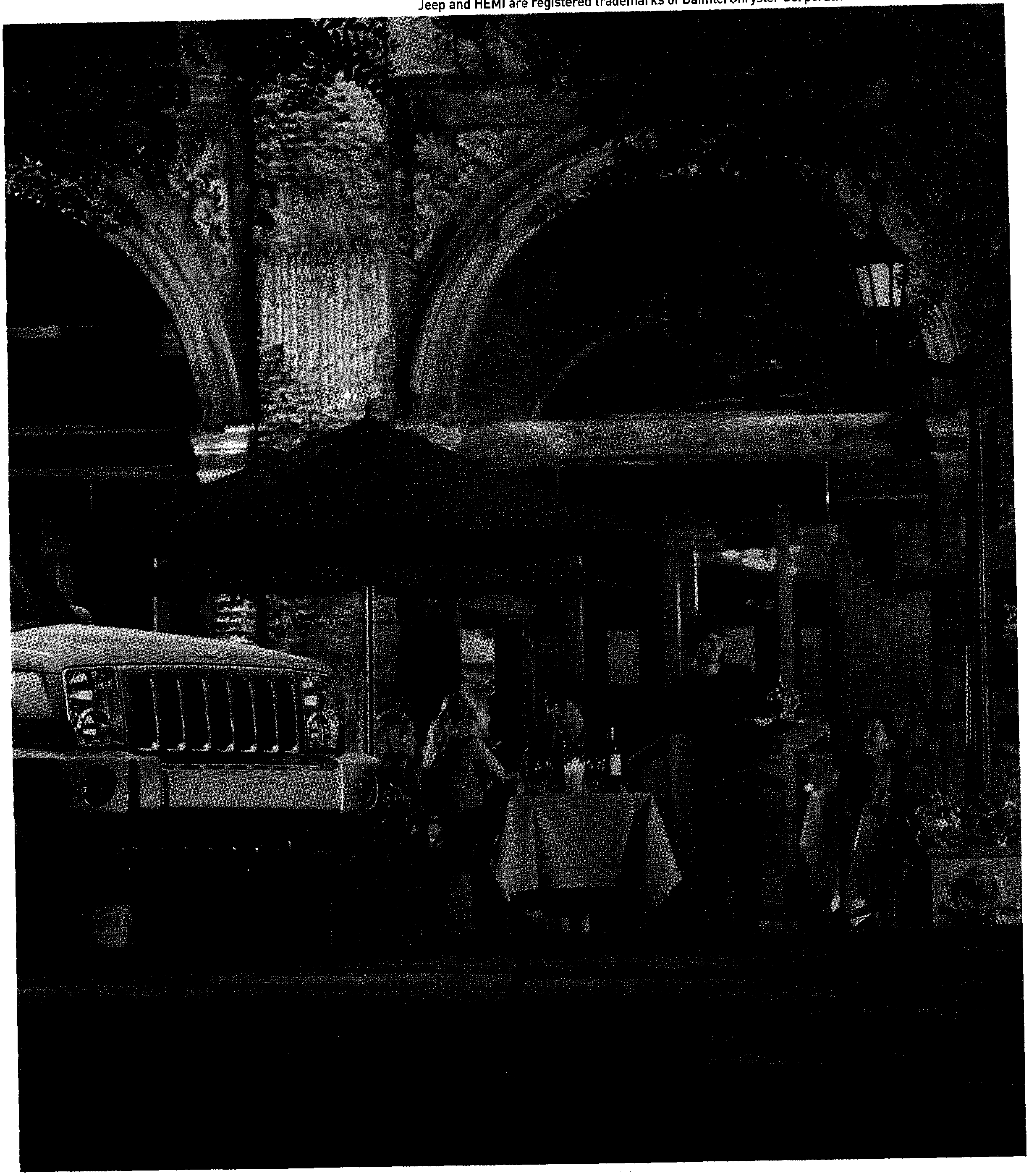

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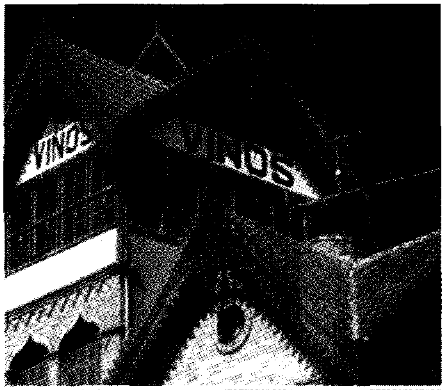

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ART BY THE NUMBERS

Malcolm Gladwell describes the methods of Platinum Blue, the music-business consultancy, and its head, Mike McCready, by writing, "He had sales data and Top 30 lists and deconvolution software, and it seemed to him that if you put them together you had an objective way of measuring something like beauty" ("The Formula," October 16th). By letting the argument shift from commercial success to beauty, Gladwell leaves unchallenged a Western-centric notion of aesthetic worth: one that, based entirely on American chart hits and the work of composers like Beethoven and Mozart, excludes much non-Western music, even while claiming a universally shared experience.
Jonah Weiner
New York City

Gladwell points out that producers have always "predicted" whether a movie will be a hit or not, and often they have been right. That is what made producers like Dore Schary, Irving Thalberg and David O. Selznick remarkable: their foresight in recognizing good stories, and also their ability to organize solid talent to insure that the production realized its potential. Of course producers had commercial interests, but when Selznick set out to make a great movie, he didn't consult a computer; he went to England and returned with Alfred Hitchcock.
Cullen Gallagher
Brooklyn, N.Y.

REMEMBERING HART CRANE

Adam Kirsch notes that many of Hart Crane's contemporaries felt that Crane and his epic poem "The Bridge" were ultimately failures (Books, October 9th). One such contemporary was the journalist and biographer M. R. Werner, who was part of the literary community in Manhattan in the nineteen-twenties and thirties which at various times included Crane, Edmund Wilson, E. E. Cummings, the youthful John Cheever, and Malcolm Cowley, among others. I knew the cheerful yet irascible Werner in his old age (he died in 1981). "He was such a faker," Werner once said of Crane. "He was always drunk, always onstage, always acting a role. I've never believed he jumped off that boat to kill himself. I think it was an act, and that Hart expected someone to jump in and rescue him." Werner grimly added, "It must have sobered Hart up when the ship kept going."
Robert Creamer
Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

DARWIN IN LITERATURE

Adam Gopnik, in his tribute to Charles Darwin as a "natural novelist" and Darwinism as "humanism in flight," refers to Darwin in relation to British writing but overlooks the many great American novels and characters that sprang from Darwin's view of life, particularly his theory of sexual selection ("Rewriting Nature," October 23rd). "The Descent of Man" sparked American realism and gave birth to Howells's Bartley Hubbard, James's Isabel Archer, Fitzgerald's Gatsby, both Jake and Brett in "The Sun Also Rises," and countless other characters. American ecological writing was also founded on Darwin's work: first came London's "The Valley of the Moon" and then Leopold's "A Sand County Almanac" and Steinbeck's "The Log from the Sea of Cortez." Gopnik ends by remarking that Darwin told us much about life but "knew that nothing could solve the problems of living." American novelists have dealt with such problems by acknowledging our common descent and developing the line of thought that Thomas H. Huxley began when he urged that we consider man's place in nature.
Bert Bender
Professor Emeritus of American Literature, Arizona State University
Tempe, Ariz.

•

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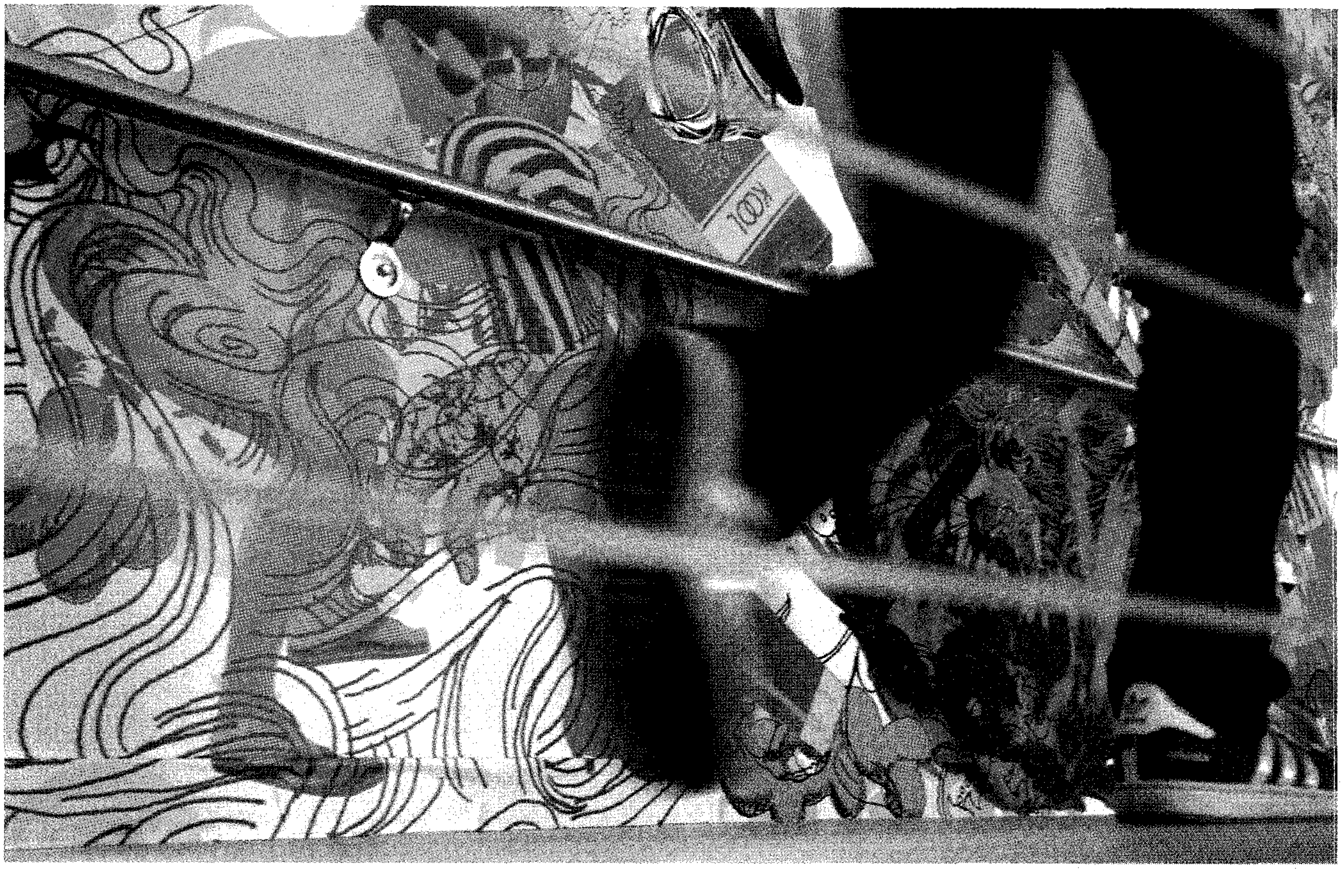


"Tropicália: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture," at the Bronx Museum. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
26	27	28	22	23	24	25

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
A SICILIAN THING

New York Theatre Workshop presents "Kaos," a drama based on the 1984 film by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani. The work is adapted from four Luigi Pirandello stories of familial and emotional disconnection set in turn-of-the-century Sicily, when mass migration was threatening to alter the cultural landscape. Martha Clarke directs and choreographs; the play will be performed in Italian with English supertitles. (See page 27.)

NIGHT LIFE
THE BEST MEDICINE

The punk group Me First and the Gimme Gimmes skewer FM radio staples with a vigor that gives new life to songs previously pronounced dead. Their latest album, "Love Their Country," applies this formula to "(Ghost) Riders in the Sky," "Desperado," and other favorites. The group comes to the B. B. King Blues Club & Grill this week. (See page 36.)

ART
A GLASS HOUSE

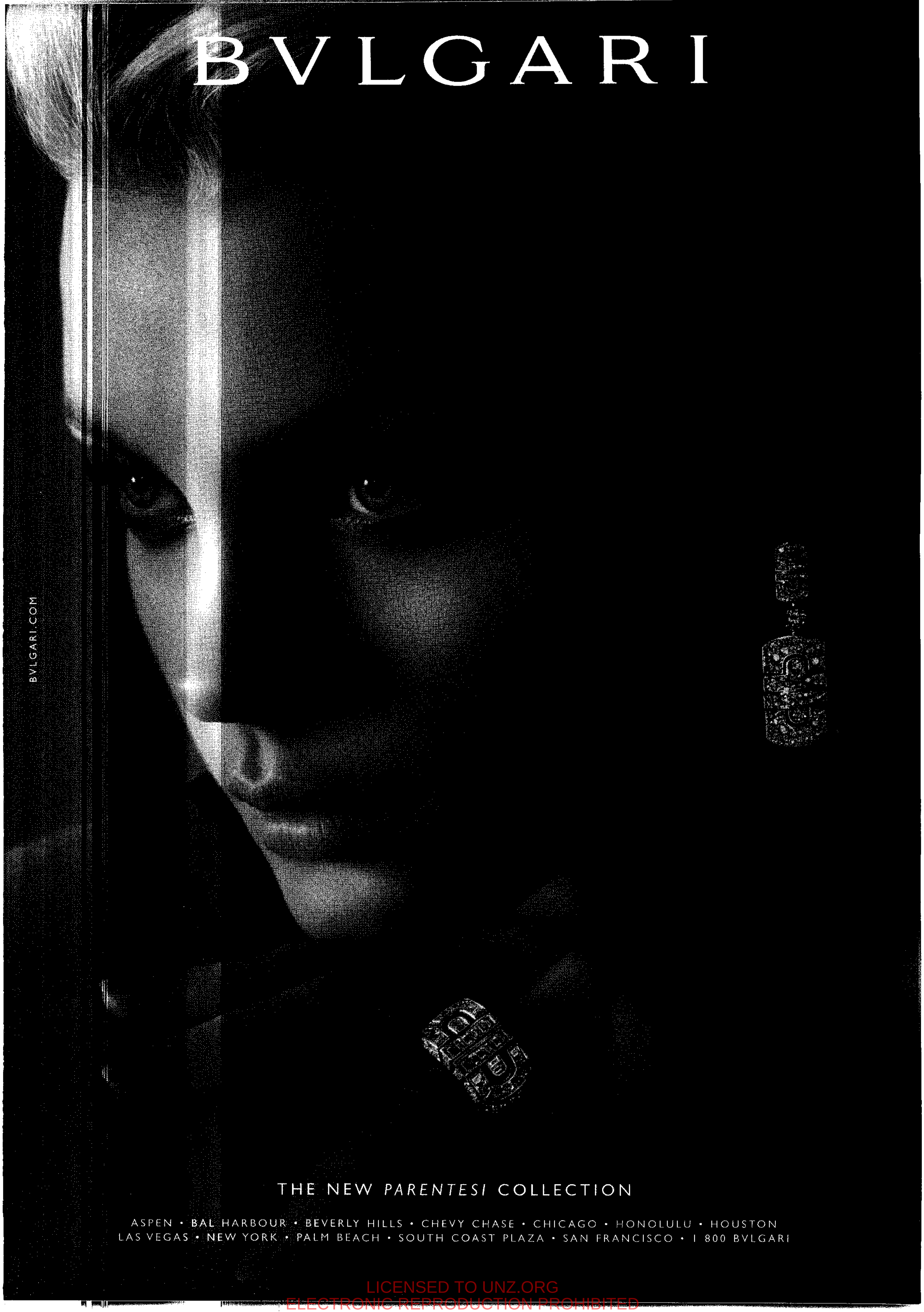
Louis Comfort Tiffany's greatest, most personal work was the estate he designed, built, and furnished in Oyster Bay, New York. It was called Laurelton Hall, and it was only around for half a century, falling to fire in 1957. A new exhibition at the Met displays salvaged furnishings, photographs, and a selection of Tiffany's own works in glass and ceramic. (See page 40.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
EAST IS WEST

Lorin Maazel and the New York Philharmonic return from their Asian tour to offer music by Beethoven (the "Eroica" Symphony) and Rachmaninoff at Avery Fisher Hall. (See page 50.)

MOVIES
SEEKING RELEASE

The title of MOMA's series "Best Film Not Playing at a Theater Near You" suggests the difficulties independent filmmakers face in getting their work released. This program offers such notable new works as "In Between Days," So Yong Kim's drama of Korean immigrant teen-agers, and "Wristcutters—A Love Story," a black comedy about the afterlife of suicides. (See page 65.)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HOLIDAY EVENTS

"THE RADIO CITY CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR"
The hardworking Rockettes won't just be kicking their long legs, falling like dominoes, and showing off their enviable physiques at this year's "Christmas Spectacular"; they have a snazzy new number set to "The Twelve Days of Christmas," a tap tour de force created for them by the show's new director and choreographer, Linda Haberman, a Broadway veteran. And of course the classics are still there: the onstage ice-skating rink, the Teddy-bear "Nutcracker," and the "Living Nativity," an utterly guileless reënactment of the Christmas story that feels like a relic from another time. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. Through Dec. 30.)

"THE NUTCRACKER"
The New York City Ballet begins its five-week run of Balanchine's classic "Nutcracker." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Nov. 24-Dec. 30.) ♦ Sometimes smaller is just as good; the New York Theatre Ballet's one-hour version—which includes both company dancers and children—takes its inspiration from the nineteenth-century English "toy theatre" and includes a jovial précis of the story delivered by the affable Dan Renkin, a.k.a. Drosselmeier. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100. Dec. 2-17.) ♦ Dances Patrelle's "Yorkville Nutcracker" takes a refreshingly local approach to the story, setting events at a holiday party at Gracie Mansion circa 1895; the girl who plays Mary—usually around fifteen years old—and the other kids in this ballet are students at dance schools around town, and they get to do some serious dancing, inspired no doubt by the presence of the lovely Jenifer Ringer (on loan from the New York City Ballet, Dec. 9 at 7 and Dec. 10 at noon and 5), in the role of Sugar Plum Fairy. (Kaye Playhouse, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-772-4448. Dec. 8-10.) ♦ Students from the Joffrey Ballet School, aged five to twenty-one, present their own condensed "Nutcracker," a traditional presentation of the story with roles tailor-made to showcase the abilities of the school's up-and-coming dancers. (Skirball Center, 566 LaGuardia Pl. 212-279-4200. Dec. 16.)

"A CHRISTMAS CAROL"
Manhattan Children's Theatre incorporates music and dance into this child-friendly version of Dickens's holiday classic. Adapted and directed by Bruce Merrill. Through Dec. 31. (52 White St. 212-352-3101.)

"TWO FROM GALILEE"
Completely Mobile Theatre Company presents a family musical based on the story of Joseph and Mary and their journey to Bethlehem. Nov. 21-26. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.)

"A VERY MERRY UNAUTHORIZED CHILDREN'S SCIENTOLOGY PAGEANT"
The Les Freres Corbusier hit returns, in which a cast of grade-school children bring the famous Scientologists Tom Cruise, Kirstie Alley, and John Travolta and founder L. Ron Hubbard to life in a mock-Christmas pageant. Nov. 29-Jan. 7. (4th Street Theatre, 83 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

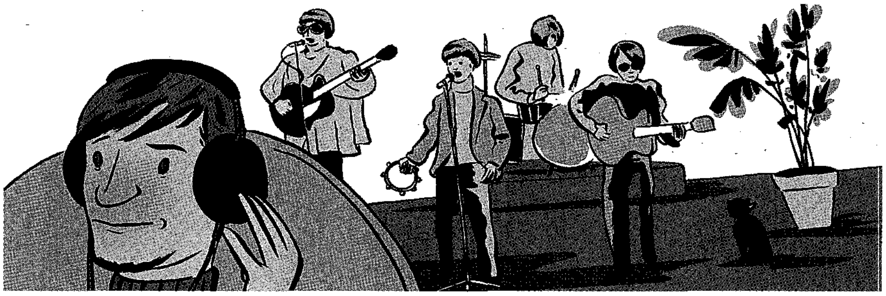
"THAT TIME OF THE YEAR"
A musical revue of Christmas and Hanukkah songs from the York Theatre Company, with book and lyrics by Laurence Jolzman and Felicia Needleman. Directed and choreographed by Annette Jolles. Nov. 29-Dec. 24. (Theatre at St. Peter's, 54th St. East of Lexington Ave. 212-935-5820.)

" 'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE . . ."
The Flea Theatre and the Chelsea Art Museum present a series of ten-minute plays inspired by the children's poem, written by Christopher Durang, Len Jenkin, Elizabeth Swados, Roger Rosenblatt, and Mac Wellman. Dec. 13-30. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

"THE CHRISTMAS REVELS"
In its twenty-seventh year, this edition of the New York Revels' convivial celebration of the winter solstice takes its cue from Slavic folklore, with boot-slapping Ukrainians, sword dancing, Bulgarian folk music, skits, and singing—and be prepared: audience members are invited to join in. Holding it all together is the wintry Russian folk tale "The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship," whose moral seems to be "The more the merrier." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 8-10.)

"HOLIDAY WONDERS"
The creators of the "Chinese New Year Spectacular" introduce their newest show at the Beacon, a cross-cultural extravaganza with a cast of more than two hundred dancers and musicians. The performance includes a number inspired by the Tunhuang Buddhist cave murals, with their images of dancing deities, and—in a nod to the "Waltz of the Snowflakes"?—a Tibetan dance evoking snow on the mountains. (2124 Broadway, at 74th St. 212-496-7070. Dec. 19-24.)

TREES
The American Museum of Natural History's origami tree, which is adorned this year with lions, tigers, elephants, giraffes, and other safari animals, goes on display on Nov. 20 in Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall. (Central Park W. at 79th St. 212-769-5100.) ♦ Nov. 21 at 3:30: The Metropolitan Museum unveils its Christmas tree, which is decorated with eighteenth-century angels and cherubs. It also has a Neapolitan baroque crèche at its base. The museum holds a lighting ceremony on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays at 3:30 and 4:30 and Fridays and Saturdays (plus Thursday, Dec. 28) hourly from 3:30 to 6:30. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-535-7710. Through Jan. 7.) ♦ Nov. 24 at 6: The South Street Seaport lights its fifty-foot holiday tree with the help of the Big Apple Chorus, which will also be appearing on Fridays at 6 and 7 and on Saturdays and Sundays at 3 and 4 through



ZOHAR LAZAR

TOP CD BOXED SETS OF 2006

Tori Amos, "A Piano" (Rhino)—No female pop singer who sits at a piano nowadays can escape Amos's shadow, and this five-disk set shows why. In the accompanying book, Amos offers surprisingly plainspoken commentary—she performs the song "Cooling" only when she is in a very bad or a very good mood—and the set is housed in a glossy black box topped by plastic piano keys.

John Coltrane, "Fearless Leader" (Prestige)—The recordings that Coltrane led for Prestige in 1957 and 1958, collected on this six-disk set, lack the visionary ambition of his momentous Atlantic and Impulse! work, but they still overflow with majestic tenor playing and superior contributions from Coltrane's associates, especially the bassist Paul Chambers.

John Lee Hooker, "Hooker" (Shout! Factory)—The oeuvre of the trance-boogie legend gives record collectors fits, since Hooker recorded for more than two dozen labels over his five-decade career. This retrospective finally does the job right, moving from the minimalist blues of the late forties through the electric sixties and on into the nineties, when Hooker duetted with artists such as Van Morrison, Ry Cooder, and Carlos Santana.

Frank Sinatra, "Sinatra: Vegas" (Reprise)—Sinatra's Las Vegas performances have become something of a cliché, but this four-CD, one-DVD set of unreleased live material is a reminder of their power. The first two disks focus on mid-career shows at the Sands Hotel and Casino, which he partly owned—a 1966 date with the Count Basie Orchestra is superb. The rest of the set settles into predictable but satisfying show-biz shtick.

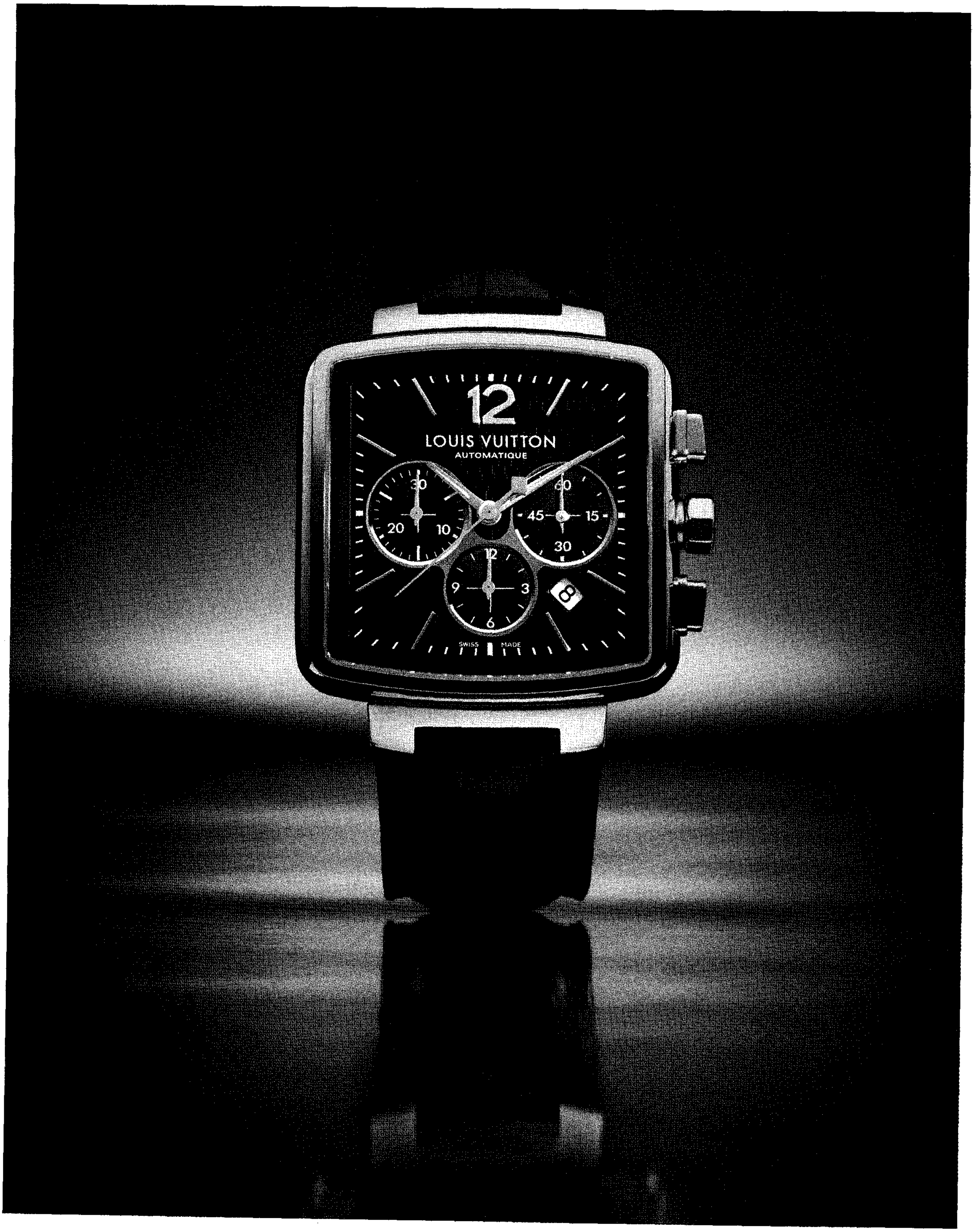
Various artists, "What It Is!: Funky Soul and Rare Grooves (1967-77)" (Rhino)—Many of the gems here found a second life in the samples of hip-hop producers during the nineteen-nineties. In recent years, however, stricter enforcement of copyright law has made most of these songs too expensive to sample. So it makes even more sense to collect the originals, which range from Cold Grits' 1969 cover of the Isley Brothers' "It's Your Thing" to Baby Huey's "Hard Times."

Various artists, "Friends of Old Time Music, the Folk Arrival 1961-1965" (Smithsonian Folkways)—In the early sixties, Ralph Rinzler, John Cohen, and Israel Young organized the Friends of Old Time Music to bring back relics from the Harry Smith anthology days. The still vigorous performers sampled in concert here include Clarence Ashley, Dock Boggs, and Mississippi John Hurt, who, after recording in New York City in 1928, was rediscovered in 1963 working on a Mississippi farm.

Fats Waller, "If You Got to Ask, You Ain't Got It!" (RCA Victor)—The producer Orrin Keepnews culled this wonderful set from Waller's huge catalogue, devoting each of its three disks to a different aspect of the jazz giant's career and highlighting Waller as a composer, a keyboardist, and an interpreter of popular song, respectively.

Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, "Legends of Country Music" (Columbia/Legacy)—The king of Western swing has been the subject of a pair of mammoth boxed sets on the German Bear Family label, but this set is all that most fans will need: a mere hundred and five tracks, including "New San Antonio Rose" and "Faded Love," which show off Wills's brilliant band and his intoxicating (and often intoxicated) exuberance.

Also noteworthy: **Bee Gees, "The Studio Albums 1967-68"** (Reprise): The band's first three British records, psychedelic-pop documents a world away from high disco. **The Byrds, "There Is a Season"** (Columbia/Legacy): It's all here, from the apogee of folk rock ("Eight Miles High") to the birth of country rock ("Sweetheart of the Rodeo") to the undistinguished late period. **Vicente Fernández, "The Living Legend"** (Norte): Three disks of classic *ranchera* that put the spotlight on Fernández's operatic vocals and melodramatic arrangements. **Robert Plant, "Nine Lives"** (Rhino)—Expanded versions of Plant's nine solo releases, including the recent "Mighty Rearranger," which reëmbraces the Led Zeppelin legacy by mixing folk-tinged hard rock with Middle Eastern music. **Johnny Rivers, "Secret Agent Man"** (Shout! Factory): A career survey of material from the underrated rock interpreter. **Weather Report, "Forecast: Tomorrow"** (Sony): A history of the fusion supergroup that featured Joe Zawinul, Wayne Shorter, and (later) the bass prodigy Jaco Pastorius.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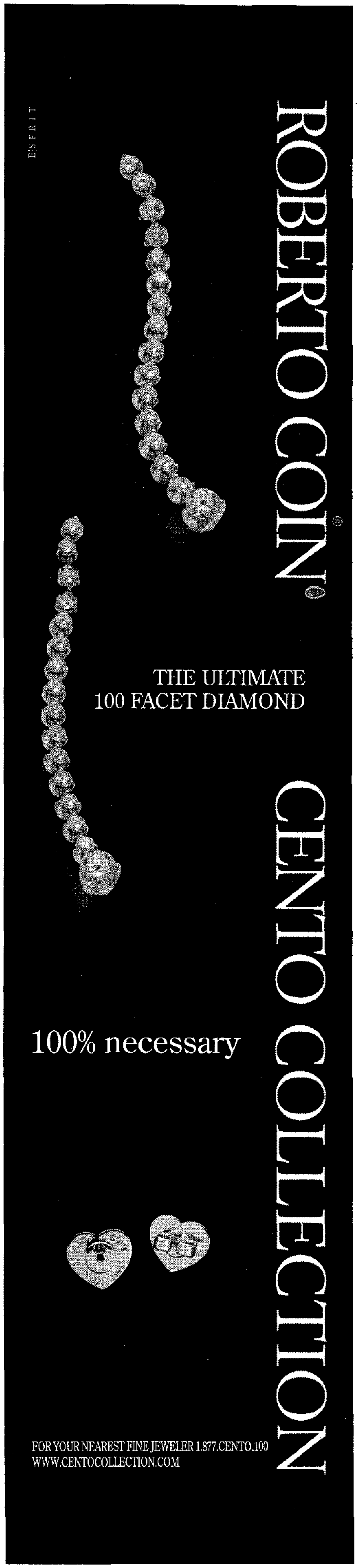


Dec. 24. (Fulton St. at Water St. 212-732-7678.) ♦ Nov. 27 at 5:30: The tenor Gregory Turay and other members of the Metropolitan Opera perform excerpts from Mozart's "Magic Flute" at the lighting of Lincoln Center's holiday conifer. The evening also includes a ballet performance (from "The Nutcracker"), music by members of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, and fire jugglers from the Big Apple Circus. (Fountain Plaza. 212-875-5456.) ♦ Nov. 29 at 7: Christina Aguilera, Sting, Bette Midler, and Lionel Richie are among the stars who will appear at the seventy-fourth annual Rockefeller Center tree-lighting ceremony. (Fifth Ave. at 50th St.)

WINTER SOLSTICE

Paul Winter brings his Consort back to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine for a slightly different show this year. The ascending sun gong and the earth ball will be there, as will the Brazilian singer and guitarist Renato Braz and the original Consort double-reed player Paul McCandless, but the action will move from the nave, which is closed for restoration, to the Crossing and Great Choir under the Cathedral's hundred-and-fifty-foot dome. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 866-468-7619. Dec. 14-15 at 7:30 and Dec. 16 at 2 and 7:30.)

HANUKKAH

The Festival of Lights begins this year on Dec. 15. That afternoon, at 3:45, the first lamp will be lit atop the thirty-two-foot-tall menorah at Fifth Ave. and 59th St. Lights will be added each night at 5:30, except for Fridays and Saturdays, when the lighting takes place at 3:45 and 8:30, respectively. There will be live music, dancing, and hot latkes on the evening of the 17th. (For more information, call 718-778-6000.) ♦ Dec. 16-17 and Dec. 19: The Hasidic reggae performer Matisyahu and guests celebrate the holiday at the Hammerstein Ballroom. (Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 212-307-7171.)

BRONX ZOO'S HOLIDAY LIGHTS

More than a hundred and fifty animal sculptures, including pink flamingos, frogs, and monkeys, glow at the Bronx Zoo starting Nov. 17. Each night there are ice-sculpture demonstrations, storytelling, and live reindeer. (Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd. 718-367-1010. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings through Dec. 17. Nightly thereafter until Jan. 1 except Dec. 24-25. The display concludes Jan. 5-7.)

CENTRAL PARK CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

In the nineteenth century, there was a popular Christmas activity called the "side hunt," in which a party would split into two groups and go off hunting. Whichever group brought back more game—birds always being by far the most numerous—was considered the winner. This tradition troubled an ornithologist named Frank Chapman, and in 1900 he instituted what he hoped would become a new ritual, a Christmas bird count. Twenty-seven like-minded souls across North America engaged in the first count that year. Expect a slightly larger turnout in Central Park on Dec. 17. (For more information, call 212-360-1396.)

ALL ABOARD!

This is the fifteenth year for the New York Botanical Garden's "Holiday Train Show," in which model trains chug their way around the conservatory past replicas of more than a hundred and forty New York City landmarks, all constructed from twigs, berries, leaves, and seeds. Joining miniature versions of Yankee Stadium, the Statue of Liberty, and Grand Central Terminal this year will be replicas of lost Manhattan mansions, like Senator William Andrews Clark's hundred-plus-room Beaux-Arts home, which stood at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 77th St. until it was torn down, in 1925. (Through Jan. 7. Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, closed Thanksgiving and Christmas days, and closing at 3 on Dec. 8 and 24. Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd., the Bronx. 718-817-8700.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC—CLASSICAL

"MESSIAH"

Attending a performance of George Frideric Handel's simple yet lavish "entertainment" on Christian themes remains the perfect holiday pilgrimage, whatever one's creed. The St. Thomas Choir, in residence at the city's grandest Episcopal church, has always offered a "Messiah" of impeccable musicality and taste—performed this year in the Mozart orchestration. This year's vocal soloists are Ava Pine, Kirsten Sollek, Joseph Gaines, and Sumner Thompson; John Scott conducts. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. Dec. 12 and Dec. 14 at 7:30. For tickets, visit www.saintthomaschurch.org.) ♦ A lovely coda to the Handel comes a few days later, when the boys of the choir (with the harpist Anna Reinersman) perform Britten's ineffably moving "Ceremony of Carols." (Dec. 20 at 5:30. No tickets required.)

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Over the last few years the orchestra has given St. Thomas a real run for its money in the "Messiah" stakes, offering internationally renowned singers (along with the estimable Westminster Symphonic Choir) in another magnificent venue, Riverside Church. This year's soloists include the soprano Dominique Labelle and the mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe; Harry Bicket, a noted Baroque specialist making his Philharmonic début, conducts. (Riverside Dr. at 120th St. Dec. 20-21 at 7:30 and Dec. 22-23 at 8.) ♦ After a rollicking première with the Phil last season, the Minnesota humorist and sage Garrison Keillor, not wishing to raise expectations too much, returns to offer "The Good Enough Holiday Show," with his long-time musical enabler, Philip Brunelle, on the podium. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 12 at 7:30.) ♦ Audra McDonald rings in the New Year with Ted Sperling and the orchestra, offering a program of holiday songs and classics from the American songbook. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 31 at 8.) (212-875-5656.)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Hearing music in the majestic intimacy of the Medieval Sculpture Hall is an essential New York experience, and for years the ideal way to do that has been to attend a concert by the gentlemen of Chanticleer, one of the nation's blue-ribbon choral groups. Their "Chanticleer Christmas" program will include, as always, a selection of carols, spirituals, and short sacred works from the Medieval and Renaissance eras. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 3 and Dec. 5-6 at 6:30 and 8:30. For a full listing of holiday concerts, see www.metmuseum.org.)

BARGEMUSIC

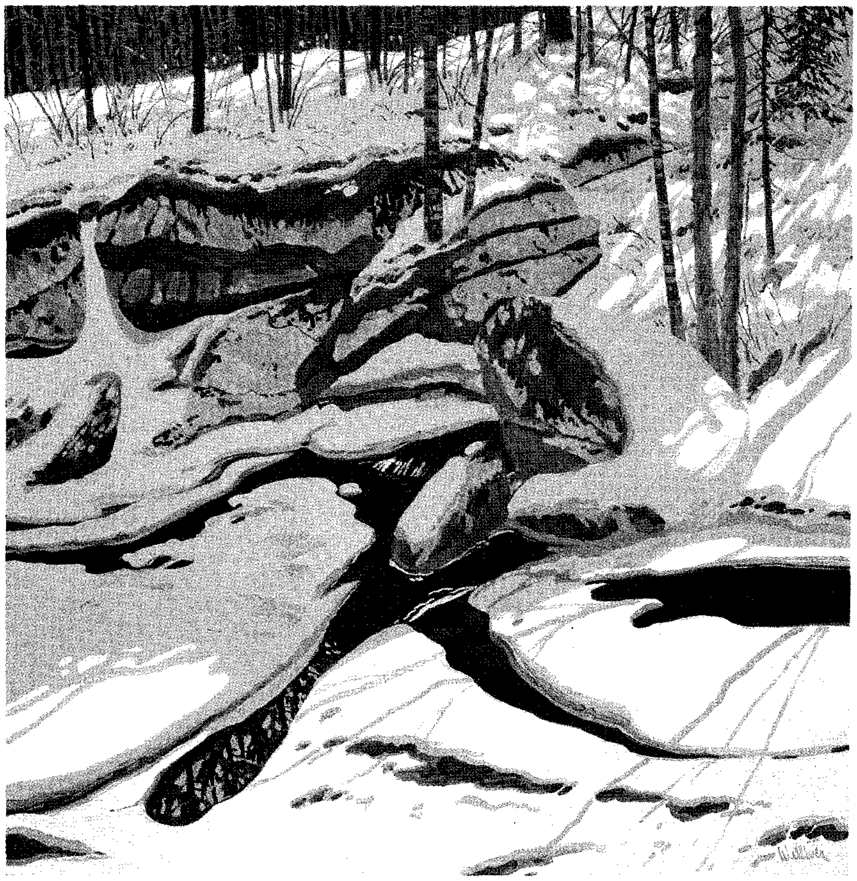
The doughty floating chamber-music series has some traditions of its own, offering intimate performances complete with refreshments and a crackling fire. The first comes on Christmas Eve, when the appealing young pianist Steven Beck offers Bach's Goldberg Variations on the barge's Steinway grand. (Dec. 24 at 4.) ♦ A company of some of the city's finest musicians (including the violinist Mark Peskanov, the violist Nicholas Cords, and the cellist Edward Arron) gathers to perform an all-Bach program on New Year's Eve that features the Brandenburg Concertos Nos. 2-6. (Dec. 31 at 7.) (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

CARNEGIE HALL

The grand hall, always reinvigorating its programming, offers an unusually tempting array of holiday treats in Stern Auditorium. The first (and most richly textured) comes courtesy of Ton Koopman's renowned Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra and Choir, who offer such favorite works as Corelli's "Christmas Concerto" and Bach's Magnificat. (Dec. 7 at 8.) (212-247-7800. For a full listing of holiday concerts, see www.carnegiehall.org.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: THE BRANDENBURG CONCERTOS

Early-music devotees may be miffed, but it would be hard to beat these performances of Bach's ebullient masterworks, given by the Society's virtuosos (including the violinist Ida Kavafian, the cellist Julie Albers, and the flutist Ransom Wilson) on gleaming modern instruments. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Dec. 17 at 5 and Dec. 19 at 7:30.)



Neil Welliver's "Thawed Ledge" (1988), at Alexandre.

MORE HOLIDAY MUSIC

"GLOBAL HIP-HOP HOLIDAY"
The Zimbabwean expat Akim Funk Buddha and friends kick off the season by singing, dancing, and rhyming their way across the cultural landscape. (BAM Café, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4139. Nov. 24-25.)

"RONNIE SPECTOR'S XMAS PARTY"
The rock legend holds her very own holiday spectacular. (B. B. King Blues Club & Grill, 237 W. 42nd St. 212-997-4144. Dec. 9-10.)

"THE WAINWRIGHT FAMILY & FRIENDS CHRISTMAS"
Martha and Rufus celebrate the holidays in high style at Carnegie Hall. (57th St. at Seventh Ave. 212-247-7800. Dec. 13.)

"RED HOT HOLIDAY STOMP"
Wynton Marsalis and members of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra bring a little New Orleans spice to the most wonderful time of the year. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Dec. 14-16.)

"Z-100 JINGLE BALL"
Evanescence, Nelly Furtado, Nick Lachey, the Killers, the Pussycat Dolls, and other pop-music luminaries turn out for a night of Yuletide cheer. (Madison Square Garden. 212-307-7171. Dec. 15.)

HOLIDAY SING-ALONG
The L.A.-based singer-songwriter Judith Owen and her husband, the comedic actor Harry Shearer, invite the audience to get in on the action. (Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. 212-874-5210. Dec. 15.)

"JEWLTIDE"
The Brooklyn-based label JDub Records and BrooklynJews.org offer an alternative to Chinese food and a movie, with performances by Golem, SoCalled, and other acts. (Southpaw, 125 Fifth Ave., Park Slope. 718-230-0236. Dec. 23-24.)

"BENDING TOWARDS THE LIGHT"
The trombonist Slide Hampton, the tap dancer Max Pollak, the Latin-jazz flutist Dave Valentin, the vocalist Hilary Kole, and other musicians perform a jazz nativity, which has been a New York tradition for more than twenty years. (Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. 212-581-3080. Dec. 24 at 6 and Dec. 25 at 5 and 8.)

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

THE APPLE TREE
Kristin Chenoweth stars in this musical from 1966, based on three stories of temptation, by Mark Twain, Frank R. Stockton, and Jules Feiffer. With music by Jerry Bock, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, and book by both. Gary Griffin ("The Color Purple") directs. Previews begin Nov. 28. (Studio 54, 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART ONE: VOYAGE
The first of three plays by Tom Stoppard about a group of nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals. The ensemble cast includes Ethan Hawke, Brían F. O'Byrne, Jennifer Ehle, Billy Crudup, and Amy Irving. In previews. Opens Nov. 27. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

COMPANY
John Doyle directs the Stephen Sondheim and George Furth Tony Award-winning musical from 1970, in which a bachelor observes the lives of five married couples. In previews. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

FLOYD AND CLEA UNDER THE WESTERN SKY
In this new musical, David Cale stars as a country singer who travels through the West with a free-spirited young woman. Cale wrote the book and lyrics and co-wrote the music with Jonathan Kreisberg. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

GUTENBERG! THE MUSICAL!
Anthony King and Scott Brown wrote this musical satire, about two playwrights who try to hit it big with a musical about the inventor of the printing press, Johannes Gutenberg. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

HIGH FIDELITY
Walter Bobbie ("Chicago") directs this musical based on Nick Hornby's best-selling novel, about a record-store owner whose girlfriend breaks up with him. In previews. (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

KAOS
Martha Clarke adapted parts of four Luigi Pirandello stories from the Taviani brothers' 1984 film "Kaos." In Italian with English supertitles. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

MURDER MYSTERY BLUES
A noir drama based on a series of short stories by Woody Allen, in which a detective is hired by a woman to find "Mr. Big." Directed by Janey Clarke, with original jazz music by Warren Wills. Previews begin Nov. 24. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

ROOM SERVICE
John Murray and Allen Boretz's 1937 show-biz farce, starring David Edwards, returns with the Peccadillo Theatre Company's original cast of twelve. In previews. Opens Nov. 28. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555.)

SPRING AWAKENING
This musical, which originated at Atlantic Theatre Company, is based on Frank Wedekind's play from 1891, about the secret inner lives of teen-agers. With music by Duncan Sheik, book and lyrics by Steven Sater, and choreography by Bill T. Jones. Michael Mayer directs. In previews. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

TWO TRAINS RUNNING
Signature Theatre Company continues its August Wilson series with this portrayal of a Pittsburgh diner in 1969. In previews. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

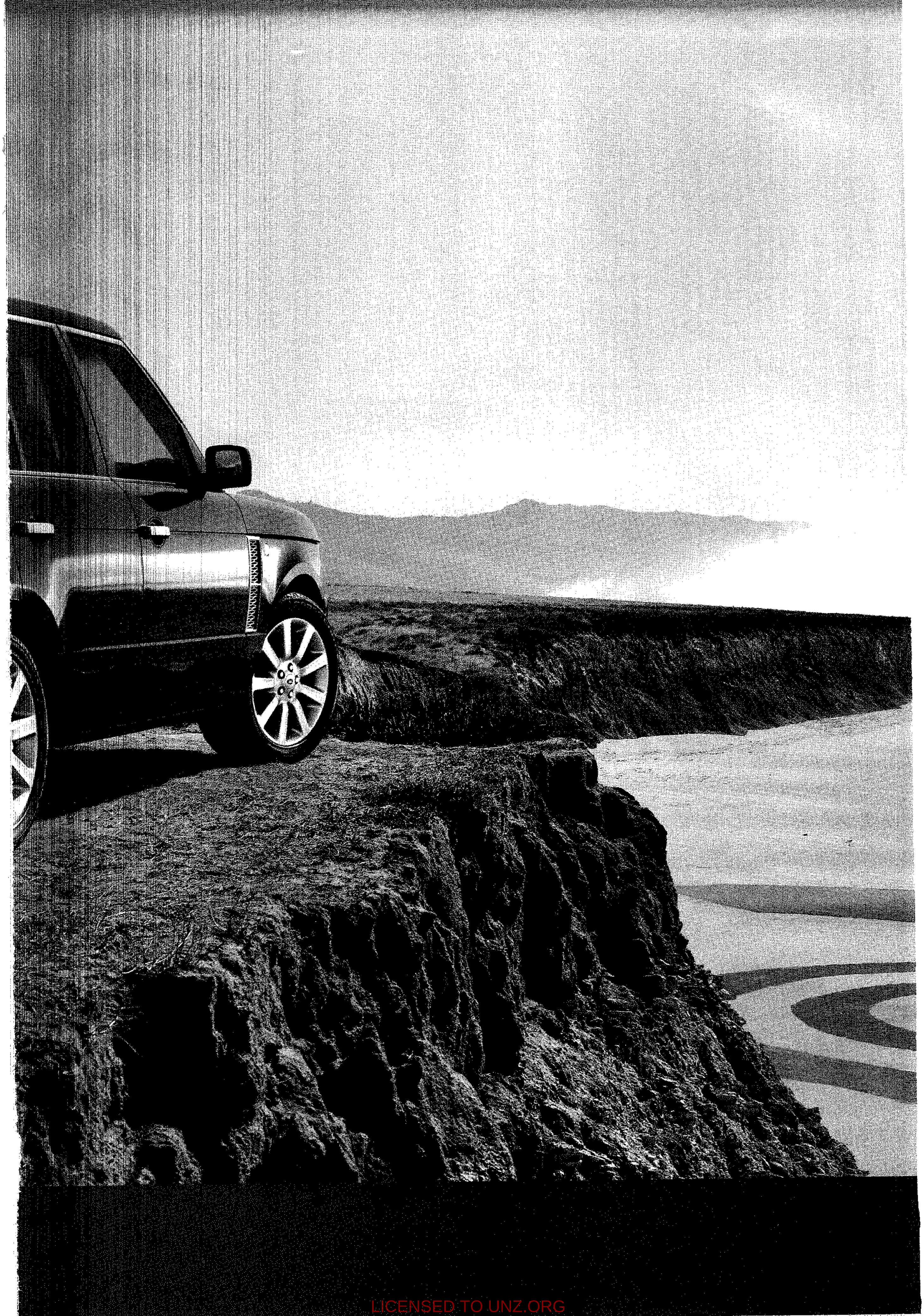
THE VERTICAL HOUR
Julianne Moore stars in the world première of David Hare's play about a young war correspondent turned political-science professor whose beliefs are challenged when she meets her boyfriend's English father (Bill Nighy). Sam Mendes directs. In previews. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

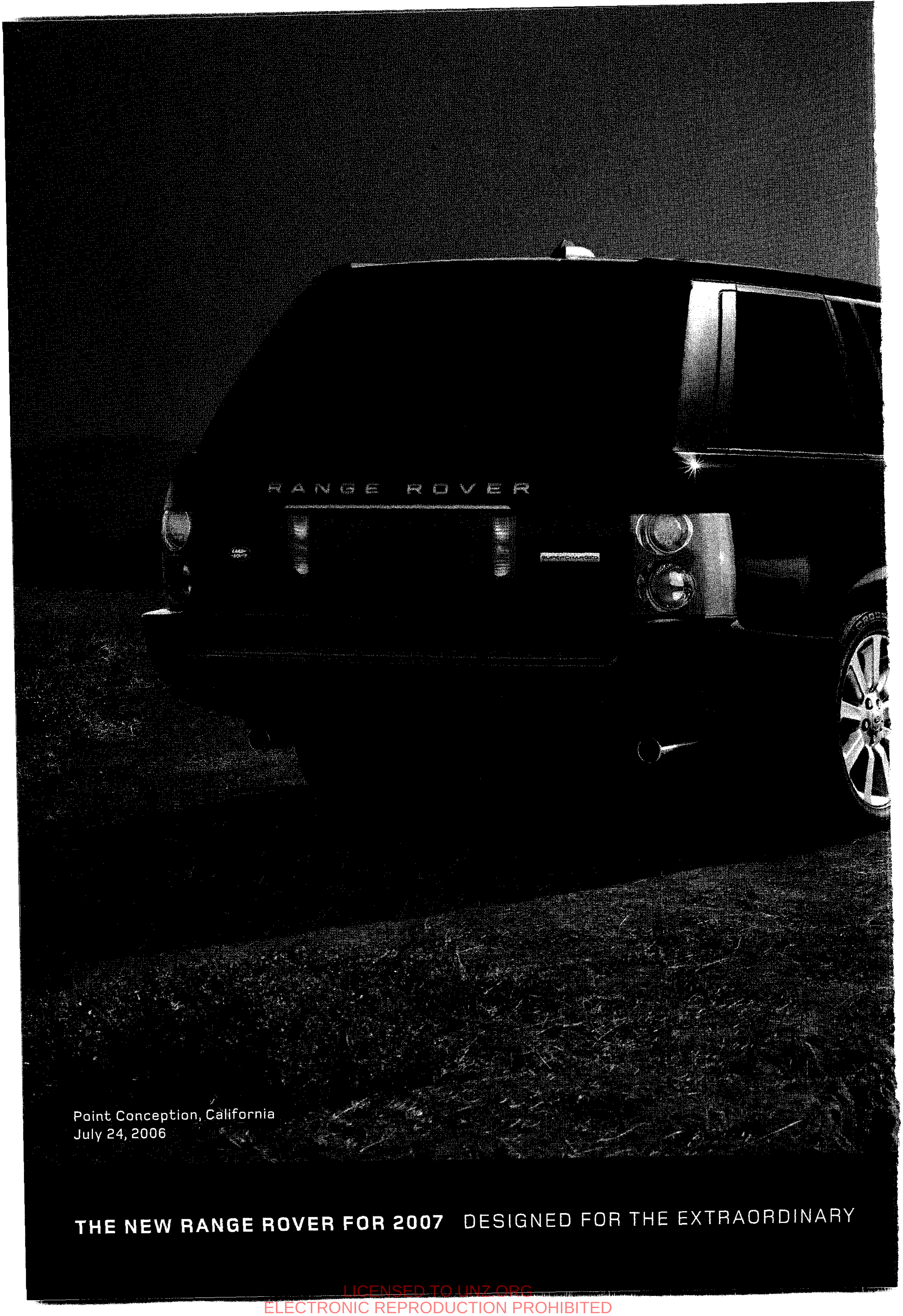
THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE
Atlantic Theatre Company presents the New York première of David Mamet's adaptation of Harley Granville-Barker's classic play, about a family whose patriarch has earned their money by embezzlement. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

THE AMERICAN PILOT
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a new drama by David Greig, about a pilot who crash-lands in a rural village in a war-torn country. (City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE CLEAN HOUSE
In the MacArthur-winning playwright Sarah Ruhl's dramatic comedy (under the direction of Bill Rauch), the play's central character, a maid named Matilde (Vanessa Aspillaga), is from Brazil. Her overachieving employer, Lane (Blair Brown), a busy, childless doctor, married to a surgeon, Charles (John Dossett), bristles with discontent, and Lane's sister, Virginia (Jill Clayburgh, who seems uneasy in her underwritten role), is a compulsive cleaner. Ruhl may poke fun at the trope of the Latina as invisible housecleaner, but she doesn't actually try to go any deeper. Ruhl ends up performing her own version of literary typecasting, conveying a lazy romanticism about the proletariat, for whom she seems to have no real feeling at all. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/13/06.) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

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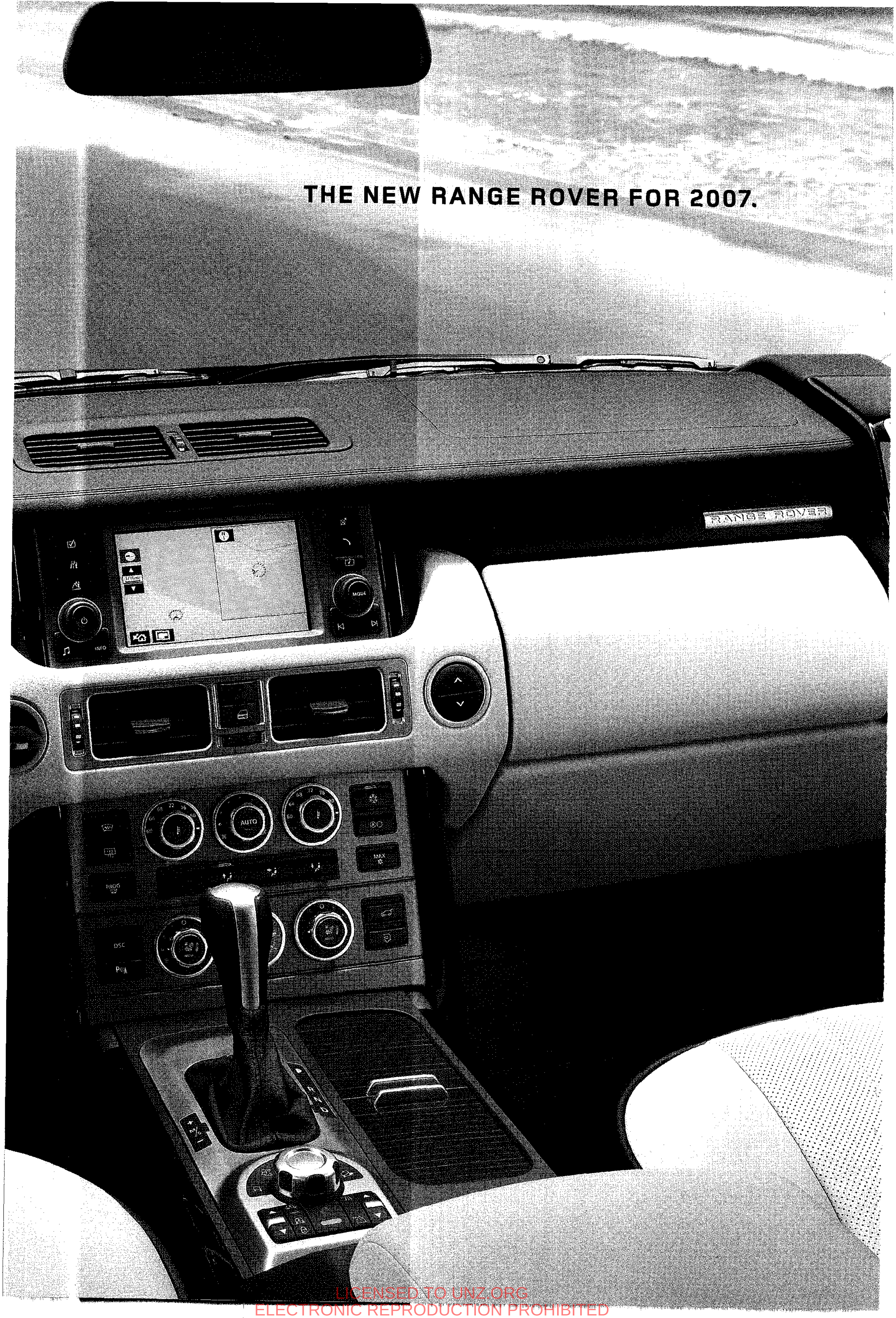
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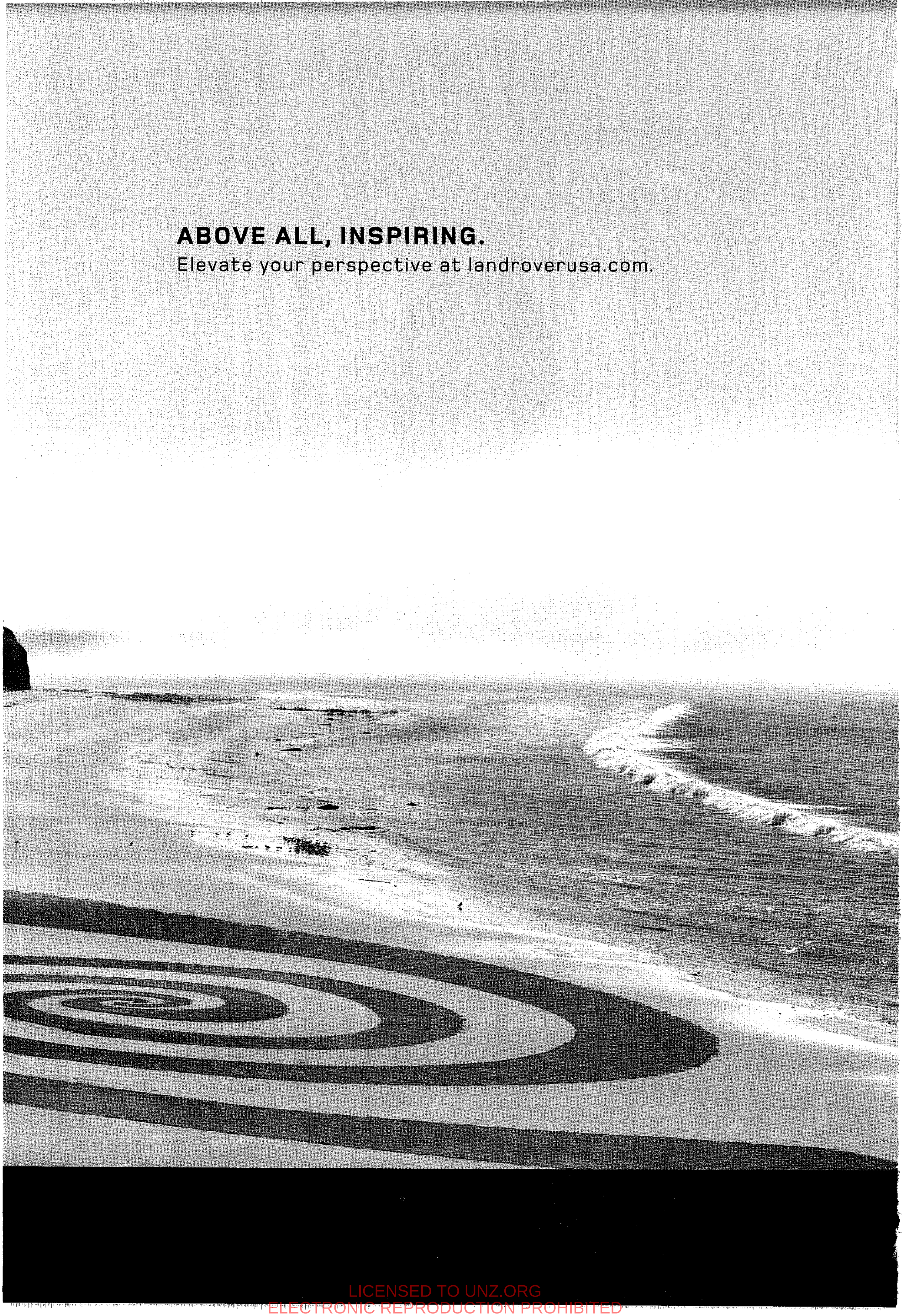
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DAI (ENOUGH)
Iris Bahr's comic one-woman show focusses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

DARK MATTERS
Trip Cullman directs Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa's drama about mystical happenings surrounding a Midwestern family. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

DR. SEUSS' HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS!—THE MUSICAL
For those who thought the Jim Carrey "Grinch" movie needed a dose of Ritalin, here is a subdued version of the holiday tale, with music by Mel Marvin and book and lyrics by Timothy Mason. Handsomely wrapped and faithful to the book, the production is as attractive as a window display at Saks. But it doesn't have any garlic in its soul, and what's missing is the mischievousness that Carrey brought to the part. (Here, Patrick Page plays the title character as a fey Brit, the go-to choice for softie villains.) Still, Christmas-weary parents will likely appreciate the stage show's charm and restraint. (Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.)

DURANGO
The world première of a new play by Julia Cho, about a Korean father who embarks on a road trip with his teenage sons. Directed by Chay Yew. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

DUSE'S FEVER
Mica Bagnasco wrote and performs in this play based on the life of the turn-of-the-century actress Eleanora Duse, set backstage during a performance of "Hedda Gabler." (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

GREAT EXPECTATIONS
Kathleen Chalfant stars in Bathsheba Doran's adaptation of the Dickens classic. Will Pomerantz directs. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

GREY GARDENS
Christine Ebersole still astounds in her dual role in the Broadway transfer of the musical based on the Maysles brothers' classic 1975 documentary about two individualistic hermits, Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter, Little Edie, who also happened to be the aunt and cousin of the late Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. Changes to songs in both the first act, which portrays the Beales' better days, and the second, a takeoff on the era of the documentary, have minimal over-all effect—the first half is still a bit of a fusty bore, and the second half still suffers from odd, uninspired ghost sequences. But Erin Davie, as Young Little Edie, livens up the role with spunk and a proper accent, and Ebersole's uncanny incarnation of Little Edie in the second half, along with the new, tragic ending, resonates well after the curtain goes down. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE INTERNATIONALIST
Much is lost in translation when a jet-lagged American, Lowell (Zak Orth), arrives in a small and sinister Central European country for a weeklong business trip. He speaks not a word of the language (playwright Anne Washburn has invented a nonsense tongue that the European characters exchange with impenetrable fluency), and hasn't a clue as to the customs. At the airport, he's met by one of his local colleagues, Sara (Annie Parisse), whom he at first mistakes for a driver. Sara's mordant observations about American privilege prove both nettlesome and seductive to Lowell; in the course of the next few days, she'll be proven all too right. Washburn's atmospheric writing ensnares us with an undertow of dark absurdity, although some of the plotting remains willfully obscure. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. Through Nov. 26.)

THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED
Douglas Carter Beane's play about how dreams are made true but ugly in the entertainment business, which has been transferred to Broadway after a successful run at Second Stage Theatre last season, could be viewed as a kind of Molièrean revenge fantasy on the writer's part. Beane casts a cold eye on the surface of a glittering, emotionally inchoate world. At the center of this universe, set in New York and Los Angeles, is a brilliant smiler with a knife, Diane (Julie White)—an agent who could give Jeremy Piven, of "Entourage" fame, a run for his adrenaline—who is trying to save her gay client, Mitchell (the terrific Tom Everett Scott), from certain movie-stardom death: he cannot be both an out gay man and a film star. Beane's action and dialogue move with the swiftness of a gold-plated locomotive headed toward disaster—which, in the real world, one would call compromise. In White, the prolific director, Scott Ellis, has found not only a great comedic star but an actress who makes the play's various weaknesses less noticeable. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

A birthday tribute to Jimi Hendrix, at B. B. King's.

RACHEL DOMM

MARY POPPINS
The smash hit from London's West End comes to Broadway. Starring Ashley Brown as Mary Poppins and Gavin Lee as Bert; Richard Eyre directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747.)

LES MISÉRABLES
Following a three-year absence, the Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg musical, based on Victor Hugo's novel and set atop a lazy Susan, returns to Broadway for a six-month disinterment. Alexander Gemignani, a glow of saintliness upon him, assumes the role of Jean Valjean, while Daphne Rubin-Vega gives a somewhat extraterrestrial performance as Fantine, rasping implosively until consumption finally carries her off. But it's perhaps the innkeeper Thénardier (Gary Beach) who best epitomizes this quickie revival: he is perfectly willing to scavenge felled bodies for gold teeth, as are the producers of "Les Misérables," who should let this poor, bloated musical rest in peace. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

AN OAK TREE
The British performer Tim Crouch has concocted a blueprint for a play that owes something to nineteen-seventies installation art. At each performance, Crouch plays the role of a hypnotist whose call for audience volunteers is answered by the father of a child whom he fatally struck—months previously—in an auto accident. A new actor or actress plays the role of the bereaved father at every performance, without any prior knowledge of the script. There's no improvisation, though. Crouch feeds the second actor his or her lines, one by one, sometimes whispering instructions through a set of headphones. It's a self-conscious device, meant to draw attention to the mesmeric quality of theatrical storytelling, but it makes for an inert experience, like a laboratory experiment with nonreactive substances. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200.)

REGRETS ONLY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents the new comedy of manners by Paul Rudnick, about the social mores of a set of wealthy Manhattanites. Starring Christine Baranski and George Grizzard. (City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

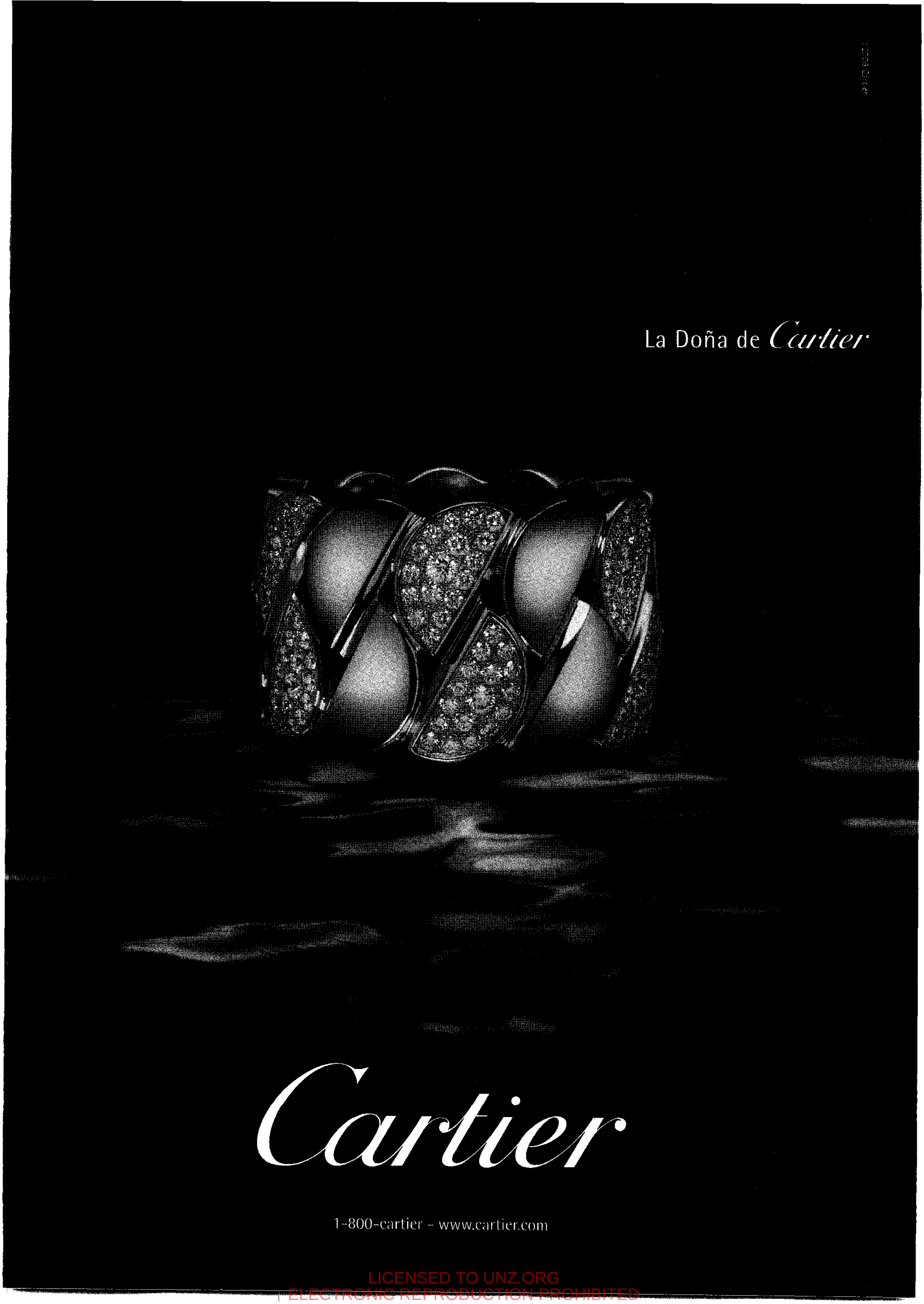
ROMANIA. KISS ME!
Six short plays by Romanian writers portray the state of flux of the country, which is on the brink of joining the European Union. Presented by the Play Company. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SCHOOL FOR WIVES
The Pearl presents Molière's drama about a man determined to teach a girl twenty years his junior to be his subservient wife. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

STRIKING 12
The pop trio GrooveLily performs an original musical—or rather, the outline of a musical draped lightly over a concert—about a New Year's Eve shut-in (Brendan Milburn, the keyboardist) and the sprightly light-bulb saleswoman (Valerie Vigoda, on electric violin) who shows up on his doorstep to revive his holiday spirits. With its mellow coffeehouse vibe, "Striking 12" doesn't make for terribly exciting theatre, but it's as warm and inviting as a mug of hot apple cider. As long as GrooveLily's brand of nutmeg rock doesn't provoke your winter demons, it stands a decent chance of chasing them away for a night. Ted Sperling directs. (Daryl Roth, 101 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER
Blythe Danner stars in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of Tennessee Williams's psychological drama. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

WOYZECK
The U.S. première of the Gate Theatre London's production of Georg Büchner's drama about a soldier's spiral into madness. Adapted and directed by Daniel Kramer. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St. 718-254-8779.)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Also Playing

ARMS AND THE MAN: Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BHUTAN:** Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200. **BUTLEY:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **EVIL DEAD THE MUSICAL:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **THE FANTASTICKS:** Snapple Theatre Center, 210 W. 50th St. 212-307-4100. **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY: SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT:** 47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **THE HAIRY APE:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Through Nov. 26. **HEARTBREAK HOUSE:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 220 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **LOSING LOUIE:** Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. Through Nov. 26. **MARTIN SHORT: FAME BECOMES ME:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **MY DEAH:** Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444. Through Nov. 26. **NO CHILD . . . :** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE:** Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

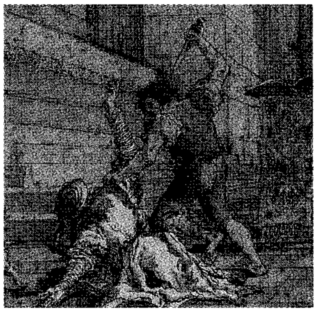
BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—Nov. 23: Two years ago, the Guinean guitarist Mamady Kouyaté, who had been arrested a number of times in his homeland for calling attention to the current plight of musicians there, fled to New York and formed the **Mandingo Ambassadors.** The group, which includes the singer Émile Soumah, performs music that recalls an earlier era in Guinea's history: the sixties, when musicians were provided with government-supported night clubs in which to rework traditional rhythms with Western horns and guitars. Nov. 24: The Colombian vocalist **Lucia Pulido.** Nov. 25: **Jack Grace,** a honky-tonk guitarist and barrel-voiced singer who is also known as the Martini Cowboy, swings by with his band. Later on Nov. 25: **Howard Fishman,** a guitarist and singer who puts a New York spin on everything from small-group swing to indie rock.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Nov. 21-22: One of Mexico's most popular rock bands, the **Jaguares** explore issues of Mexican identity and iconography with intense passion. Nov. 24-25: The crooked grin and dusty-booted songs of **Jerry Jeff Walker.** Nov. 26: **Me First and the Gimme Gimmes** are a squad of punk-rock wiseacres from other bands (notably NOFX, Lagwagon, No Use for a Name, and Swingin' Utters) who specialize in novelty cover versions. They started off in the late nineties by lampooning such easy targets as John Denver, Simon & Garfunkel, and Barry Manilow. They have since widened the scope of their attack. The group's latest album, "Love Their Country," takes on chestnuts by Willie Nelson, the Eagles, Dolly Parton, and others. Nov. 27: The guitarists **Johnny Winter** and **Larry Coryell** join the drummer **Buddy Miles** and a slew of other notable artists for a tribute to Jimi Hendrix, on what would have been his sixty-fourth birthday. Nov. 28: **Redman, Keith Murray,** and

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
BIBLICAL SENSE

Calling all illustrators! "Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804): A New Testament," at the Frick, convenes scores of large drawings from an underknown suite of three hundred and thirteen that constitutes one of history's signal feats of visual narrative. It is a treasury of pictorial rhetoric, right on time, in our era of graphic novels, for study and the odd theft. Domenico, son of the ceiling master Giambattista, devoted some five years to his graphic Gospel, limning Biblical and Apocryphal scenes from and about the life of Christ. Every picture crackles with particular energy, on a sliding scale from breezy anecdote (often attended by a dog or two) to violent action. Jittery, electric line overlays black chalk sketching and ink washes. Composition rules. The figures may appear to animate space, but, in fact, spatial dynamics—vectors, vortices, torques—vitalize the figures. How is it done? Look and see. Note the way space is frequently organized and compressed on a downward slant from the right—abruptly reversed in a "Resurrection" that propels Christ skyward with the visual correlative of a startled shout.

—*Peter Schjeldahl*



DOMENICO TIEPOLO, DETAIL FROM "THE SLAYING OF ZACHARIAS" (1786-1790)

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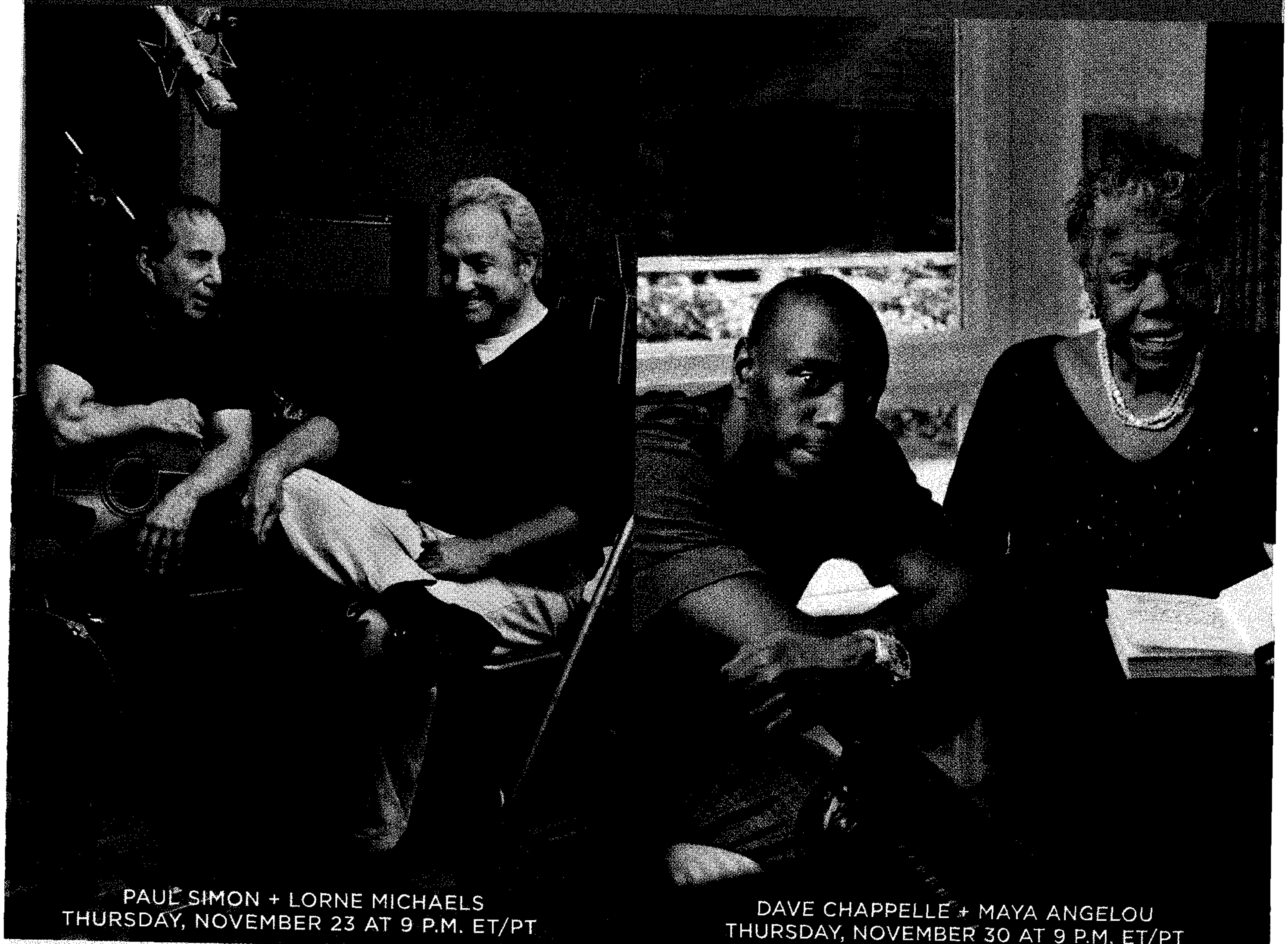

PAUL SIMON + LORNE MICHAELS
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DAVE CHAPPELLE + MAYA ANGELOU
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30 AT 9 P.M. ET/PT

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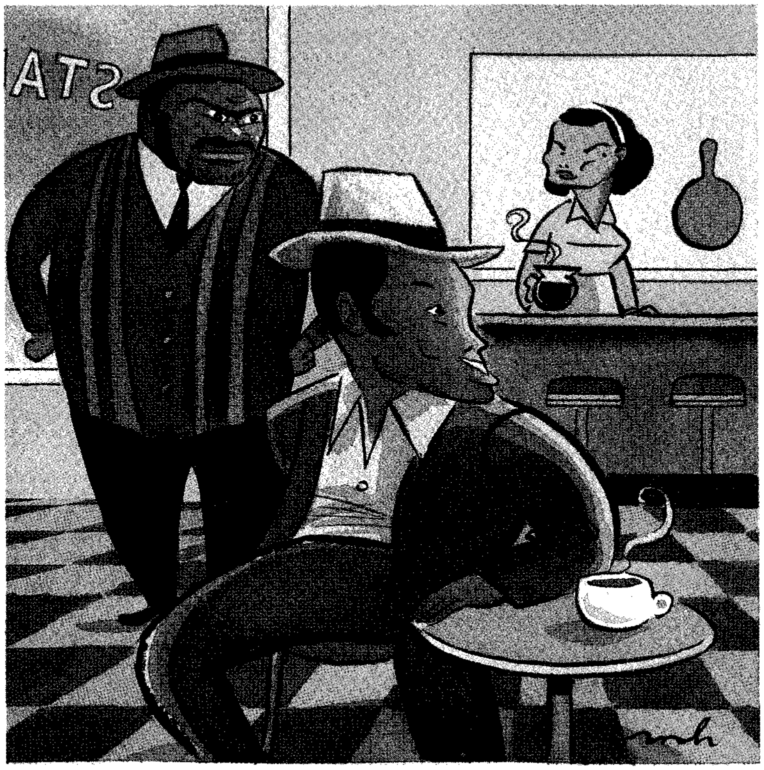
Raekwon are three throwback m.c.s who can be expected to deliver a fine live show.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Nov. 21-22: **Beirut,** a local band led by a fresh-faced youngster named Zach Condon, has been the toast of the blogosphere for its unabashedly charming Gypsy rock.

CARNEGIE HALL
57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—Nov. 25: It's been more than forty years since **Arlo Guthrie** was arrested one Thanksgiving weekend for littering in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, a sow's-ear experience that he turned into a silk purse with "Alice's Restaurant." His surname was famous long before that protest song made its mark, and with this tour Arlo celebrates the legacy of his family, from "This Land Is Your Land" and other timeless classics of his father, Woody, to the contemporary work of his son, **Abe,** and his daughter **Sarah Lee** and her husband, **Johnny Irion.**


August Wilson's "Two Trains Running," at Peter Norton Space.

HAMMERSTEIN BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 22: **Wolfmother** may be very much of the moment, what with a song in a prominent iPod ad and a track in the "Jackass: Number Two" film, but the Australian rock trio's studied aesthetic is shamelessly retro. With large-trousered swagger, prog-metal sound, and a penchant for sorcery-soaked subject matter, Wolfmother clearly pines for an age of rock and roll that vanished long ago. Nov. 24-25: The **Disco Biscuits** may have a silly name, but they're serious about their music. Seriously groovy, that is. Formed in the mid-nineties at the University of Pennsylvania, the Biscuits have risen to the top of the jam-band scene through hard work and thoughtful experimentation. In concert, they've been known to mix classical and jazz passages into their electronica-fuelled sets.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Nov. 22: **Little Steven's Underground Garage Fest.** Though Little Steven Van Zandt is undoubtedly smarting from the recent loss of CBGB's (a club the erstwhile E Street guitarist and "Sopranos" cast member did his best to preserve), the devoted rock archivist hasn't thrown in the towel. Stemming from the great man's much fêted radio program, this year's festival includes the proto-punk granddaddies the **New York Dolls,** the garage-rock revivalists the **Chesterfield Kings,** and the rollicking potty-mouthed outfit the **Supersuckers.** Nov. 24: The sexually assertive Canadian performer **Peaches** (a.k.a. Merrill Nisker) delivers shrewdly crude lo-fi rock and electronica. With **Quintron and Miss Pussycat,** a husband-and-wife performance duo on leave from the steamy environs of New Orleans, whose music is a joy-inspiring mix of funky grooves, electric boogie-woogie, and sterling eccentricity.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Nov. 22: Two storied bands who've always flown well beneath the radar, **Pere Ubu** and the **Bush Tetras** may not get as much credit as the Gang of Four or Talking Heads, but they should get plenty. Pere Ubu emerged from Cleveland's proto-punk band Rocket from the Tombs and forged a truly unique sound that was tense, arty, dark, and literate, punctuated by the vocalist David Thomas's oblique lyrics and wheezy chirp and the keyboardist Allen Ravenstine's eerie synthesizers. New York's Bush Tetras were tenuously affiliated with the fleeting No Wave scene of the early eighties, but their scratchy, kinetic sound separated them from that scene's preoccupation with brain-rattling noise. Both bands continue to practice the experimental strain of post-punk in its bravest form.

MARCELLUS HALL

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Nov. 24-25: The **Dark Star Orchestra** re-creates Grateful Dead shows with a flashback-inducing meticulousness.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Nov. 24-25: **Stand,** a band of four strivers from Dublin who are now based in New York, rocks with arena-size ambition.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Nov. 24: The **Sounds,** from Sweden, make crystalline dance music that's a mix of rock and Euro-pop. Fronted by the icy blonde Maja Ivarsson, the group delivers it all with a sexy punch. Nov. 25: New Jersey's **Senses Fail** play a vein-popping strain of punk pop called screamo, a cross between the breakneck energy of hardcore and the soul-bearing emotions of emo. With **Bleeding Through, Drive By,** and **Saosin.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-965-9177)—**Matt Darriau,** a composer who plays saxophone, flute, and clarinet, has been a member of the Klezmatics for more than a decade, and he also leads the Balkan-infused Paradox Trio (the paradox is that it's a quartet) and the avant-swing outfit Ballin' the Jack. He's here on Nov. 22 with Yo Lateef, his tribute band honoring the woodwind master Yusef Lateef (he played in the ensembles of Charles Mingus, Cannonball Adderley, Miles Davis, and Dizzy Gillespie), whose blending of Eastern music with American jazz is said to have influenced John Coltrane. Nov. 26: **Stephane Wrembel** (see Joe's Pub, below).

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—**Lee Konitz,** a jazz septuagenarian playing at the peak of his creative life, is an adherent of pure improvisation: clichés, well-worn licks, and stock phrases are just not options for him. The alto saxophonist leads a trio featuring the neo-bop guitarist **Peter Bernstein** here Nov. 22-25.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Nov. 21-26: **David Sanborn's** funky pop-jazz inspires love and hatred in the jazz community, but few can deny the tonal beauty and suave phrasing of his alto-saxophone playing.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through Dec. 31: Whether taking on standards, Disney classics, or holiday favorites, **Steve Tyrell** imbues it all with the mirth of a successful late bloomer who still can't quite believe his good fortune.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Nov. 21-26: A salute to Benny Goodman with the masterly, King of Swing-besotted clarinettist **Ken Peplowski,** whose cohorts here include two Goodman-band veterans: the guitarist **Bucky Pizzarelli** and the pianist **Derek Smith.**

JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—Nov. 24-26: Until jazz ensembles start regularly incorporating tuba, cello, and acoustic guitar into their lineups, Henry Threadgill's adventurous ensemble **Zooid** will remain outside the mainstream, but that's where Threadgill seems most comfortable anyway.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Nov. 21-22 and Nov. 24-26: The **Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra.** In garnering the first-ever Grammy for an online-only release, the 2004 album "Concert in the Garden," Schneider found herself a poster girl for twenty-first-century commerce. As an arranger, composer, and bandleader, she has the vision, moxie, and flavorful charts—often long on atmosphere if not always substance—to keep a distinctive large ensemble afloat, at least on a semi-regular basis.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—There's no doubt that the French guitarist **Stephane Wrembel** has found his spiritual home in the music of Django Reinhardt and, more generally, in Gypsy jazz (you might even say he wrote the book on the latter, since he produced a method book, with CD, on Gypsy jazz guitar in 2004). Since coming to New York four years ago with a degree from Berklee, Wrembel (a regular at Django-fests around the country) has consistently awed audiences with his dexterous versions of standards, original compositions, and the beloved Django fare. On Nov. 22 Wrembel and his trio celebrate the release of their latest album, "Barbès-Brooklyn," which is named after the club where the guitarist enjoys a long-term Sunday-night residency.

MINTON'S PLAYHOUSE
208 W. 118th St. (212-864-8346)—Nov. 24-25: The **Curtis Fuller** quartet. With a background that includes significant associations with Art Blakey, John Coltrane, Quincy Jones, and Dizzy Gillespie, the trombonist Fuller is an authentic hard-bop champion.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Nov. 21-26: The **Joe Lovano** nonet. Commissioned by the Monterey Jazz Festival in 2001, the omnivorously musical Gunther Schuller de-

vised a suite for the saxophonist Lovano and his nonet, drawing on selections from Miles Davis's epochal mid-century "Birth of the Cool"-era recordings. Lovano built his most recent album, "Streams of Expression," around Schuler's tribute. The result is a typically ambitious, sprawling project that features strong playing from the leader as well as the saxophonists **George Garzone** and **Ralph Lalama**. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s"** features work by ten Weimar-era artists, including Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Ludwig Meidner. Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"New Orleans After the Flood: Photographs by Robert Polidori."** With two exhibitions of large-scale color photographs in town, Polidori proves himself a connoisseur of ruin. At Houk, he shows work made in schools and hospitals that were abandoned after the nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl and later vandalized or damaged by the elements. The Met show is devoted to his pictures from New Orleans, some taken shortly after Katrina flooded the city, some made months later; several appeared in the pages of this magazine. Perhaps because the disaster was closer to home and much of the worst destruction took place in people's houses, the New Orleans photos are both more devastating and more fascinating. Polidori contemplates the spectacular mess—from cars upended on roofs to a bloated mattress spilling its fleshy pink guts—with the gravity and care of a history painter. Through Dec. 10. ♦ **"Americans in Paris, 1860-1900."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ **"Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde."** The Parisian gallerist Vollard (1866-1939) was an early champion of Matisse, Bonnard, van Gogh, and many other painters; this unusually canted show comprises samples of the work that they made with his encouragement and patronage. The two giants of the show's title are represented with canvases from solo shows that Vollard mounted in 1895 and 1901, respectively. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate."** Opens Nov. 21. ♦ **"Set in Stone: The Face in Medieval Sculpture."** Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art of the Papuan Gulf."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Sean Scully: Wall of Light."** Through Jan. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Manet and the Execution of Maximilian."** Through Jan. 29. ♦ **"Brice Marden: A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings."** Through Jan. 15. ♦ **"Projects 83: Monika Sosnowska."** Through Nov. 27. ♦ **"Eija-Liisa Ahtila: The Wind."** Through Feb. 5. ♦ **"OMA in Beijing: China Central Television Headquarters by Ole Scheeren and Rem Koolhaas."** Models, renderings, and related drawings track plans for an innovative complex of buildings, scheduled to open before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Through Feb. 26. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Spanish Painting from El Greco to Picasso: Time, Truth, and History."** Through March 28. ♦ **"Lucio Fontana: Venice/New York."** Two bodies of work by the Italian artist (1899-1968) best known for his slashed canvases. Through Jan. 21. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005."** Through Feb. 11. ♦ **"Albers and Moholy-Nagy: From the Bauhaus to the New World."** In this exhibition, all roads in modernism lead back to Josef Albers and László Moholy-Nagy. Their work could be mistaken for Russian Suprematism, Constructivism, Dada, or Surrealism. Similarly, their efforts spanned the fields of painting, sculpture, photography, film, and furniture design. Both taught at the Bauhaus. Albers moved on to Black Mountain College, in North Carolina, then Yale; Moholy-Nagy started the New Bauhaus, in Chicago, which later became the Institute of Design. In a sense they are still teaching, whether Albers's dictates on color (evident in his late "Homage to the Square" series) or Moholy-Nagy's experimental approach to photography, or the basic notion that art is not about finding a style and sticking to it. Through Jan. 21. ♦ **"Picasso and American Art."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ **Mark Grotjahn's** large-scale works in pencil toy with geometry and multiple vanishing points; he ventures into color with a pair of drawings in saturated reds and yellows that anchor the room. Through Jan. 7. ♦ Works by Edward Hopper fill the fifth floor, including "Nighthawks," on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago. Through Dec. 31. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Annie Leibovitz: A Photographer's Life, 1990-2005."** Through Jan. 21. ♦ **"Tigers of Wrath: Watercolors by Walton Ford"** is a hit. The satirical thrust (protesting human depredations of nature) and archaism (extending to ostensibly age-spotted paper) of Ford's huge, Audubon-style wildlife pictures can seem strained when viewed one by one. But the fifty of them here generate a rolling charge of antic emotion and voracious intellect. Ford's comprehension of his subjects—exotic species and the nineteenth-century men who sentimentalized and destroyed them—is wide-ranging, profound, and darkly hilarious. Rumbling throughout is an Oedipal agon with Audubon, whom Ford has called "a total dick and not even that good an artist" but whose baleful genius he vivifies. Through Jan. 28. ♦ **"Ron Mueck."** Through Feb. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"A Deaf Artist in Early America: The Worlds of John Brewster Jr."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and until 7:30 on Fridays.)

ASIA SOCIETY
Park Ave. at 70th St. (212-288-6400)—**"Gilded Splendor: Treasures of China's Liao Empire (907-1125)."** Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now."** Through Dec. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Friday evenings until 9.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS
1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—In the late sixties in Brazil, the favelas were growing, an oppressive dictatorship was in power, and worker strikes and student rebellions were widespread—but Brazilians still knew how to throw a marvellous party. The multidimensional movement known as Tropicália—which centered on music but flowed outward to encompass theatre, film, poetry, visual art, and revolutionary politics—was in full swing. The movement's roots, flowering, and lingering effects are surveyed in **"Tropicália: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture,"** with emphasis on the stars of musical and visual production: Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Clark and younger artists such as Ernesto Neto, Rivane Neuenschwander, and the art collective Assume Vivid Astro Focus, among others. Oiticica's installation "Eden" includes a wading pool and live parrots. There are also interactive sculptures, paintings, examples of theatre and clothing design, and extensive documentation in the form of video clips, magazines, and posters. Through Jan. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"Made to Scale: Staircase Masterpieces."** A collection of staircase models, mostly from nineteenth-century France. Through June 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

TABLES FOR TWO

BRIDGE CAFÉ

279 Water St., at Dover St. (212-227-3344)—This restaurant, housed in a red painted wooden building in the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge, has a lively history: the structure dates from as early as 1794, five prostitutes registered their occupancy of the third floor during the census of 1855, and the bar has served beer to fishmongers, pirates, snitches, and newspapermen, even through Prohibition. Adam Weprin, whose family owns the restaurant, says the place also plays host to poltergeists: disembodied footsteps treading the floors, impertinent spectral presences felt in both the men's and the ladies' rooms, and spooky whispers in one's ear. According to exhaustive research conducted by Richard McDermott, a retired science teacher and freelance historian, the Bridge Café should be considered the city's oldest drinking establishment. (McDermott, unsurprisingly, is not entirely welcome at McSorley's Old Ale House.)

When the Weprin family took over, in 1979, they renovated the restaurant but retained the dining room's nineteen-twenties lineaments—a low, pressed-tin ceiling, white wainscot walls, and a wooden bar running its length. The Weprins also tried to keep some of the local color by charging the bookies, who had long been regulars, pre-upgrade prices. The illicit company never seemed to bother another frequent visitor, Ed Koch, who ate there at least twice a week during his mayoralty.

It's easy to see what kept them all coming back. The food here is given haute-cuisine billing (the lamb chops come in a "cabernet and fresh herb reduction"), but what arrives on the plate is pure heartland, from the generous portions to the profligate use of butter. A crab-artichoke-and-spinach fondue was meaty and rich. Goat cheese somewhat overwhelmed the autumn-vegetable strata, but the smoked-gouda-and-pine-nut crust on the chicken was nicely understated. Pounded flat and fried, the fowl was juicy and crisp, though nearly outshone by its side dish of creamy mashed potatoes. Fortunately, you probably won't have room for dessert: a wedge of pumpkin pie looked and tasted rather wan, with a pallid crust. A glass of Muscat De Frontignan might be a better choice for those waiting around for the ghosts to emerge. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for lunch and dinner, Sundays for brunch and dinner. Entrées $20-$30.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

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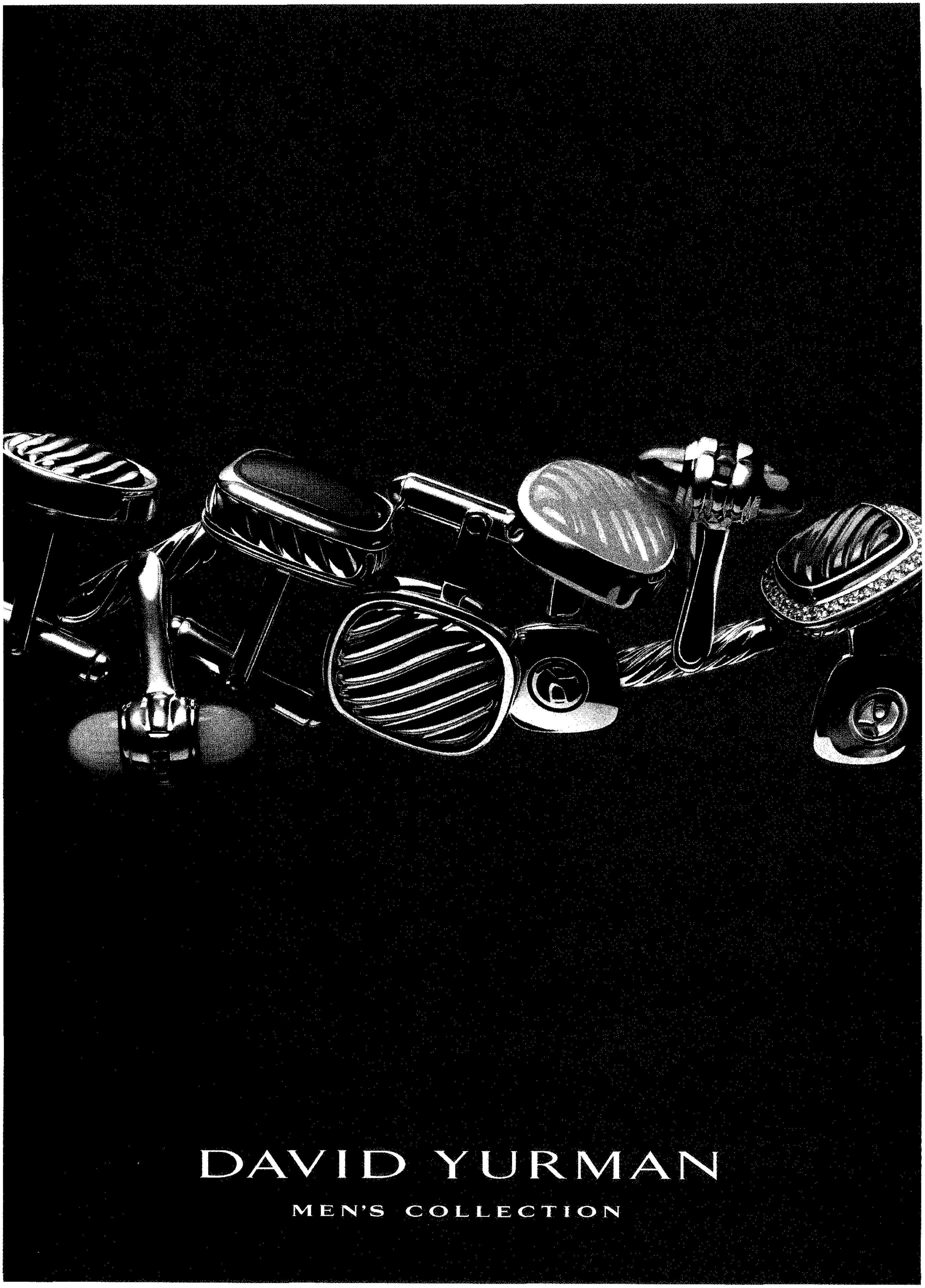
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DAHESH MUSEUM OF ART
580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—**"Napoleon on the Nile: Soldiers, Artists, and the Rediscovery of Egypt."** Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Cimabue and Early Italian Devotional Painting."** Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804): A New Testament."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—The theme of **"Ecotopia,"** I.C.P.'s second Triennial of Photography and Video, is the global environment in flux and in trouble. The artists, some making their New York début, are from fourteen countries and include Simon Norfolk, Sophie Ristelhueber, Robert Adams, Thomas Ruff, Alessandra Sanguinetti, Mitch Epstein, and Joan Fontcuberta. Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Alex Katz Paints Ada."** Through March 18. ♦ **"Masters of American Comics"** and **"Superheroes: Good and Evil in American Comics."** Through Jan. 28. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Fragonard and the French Tradition"** celebrates the bicentennial of the rococo master's death with an exploration of his revival of the red-chalk technique, linking his works on paper to those of artists he was influenced by, or influenced—including François Boucher, Jean-Baptiste Greuze, Jean-Jacques Lagrenée, and Hubert Robert. Despite the sober palette, coquettish maidens and leafy parklands still abound. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"Bob Dylan's American Journey: 1956-1966."** Through Jan. 6. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

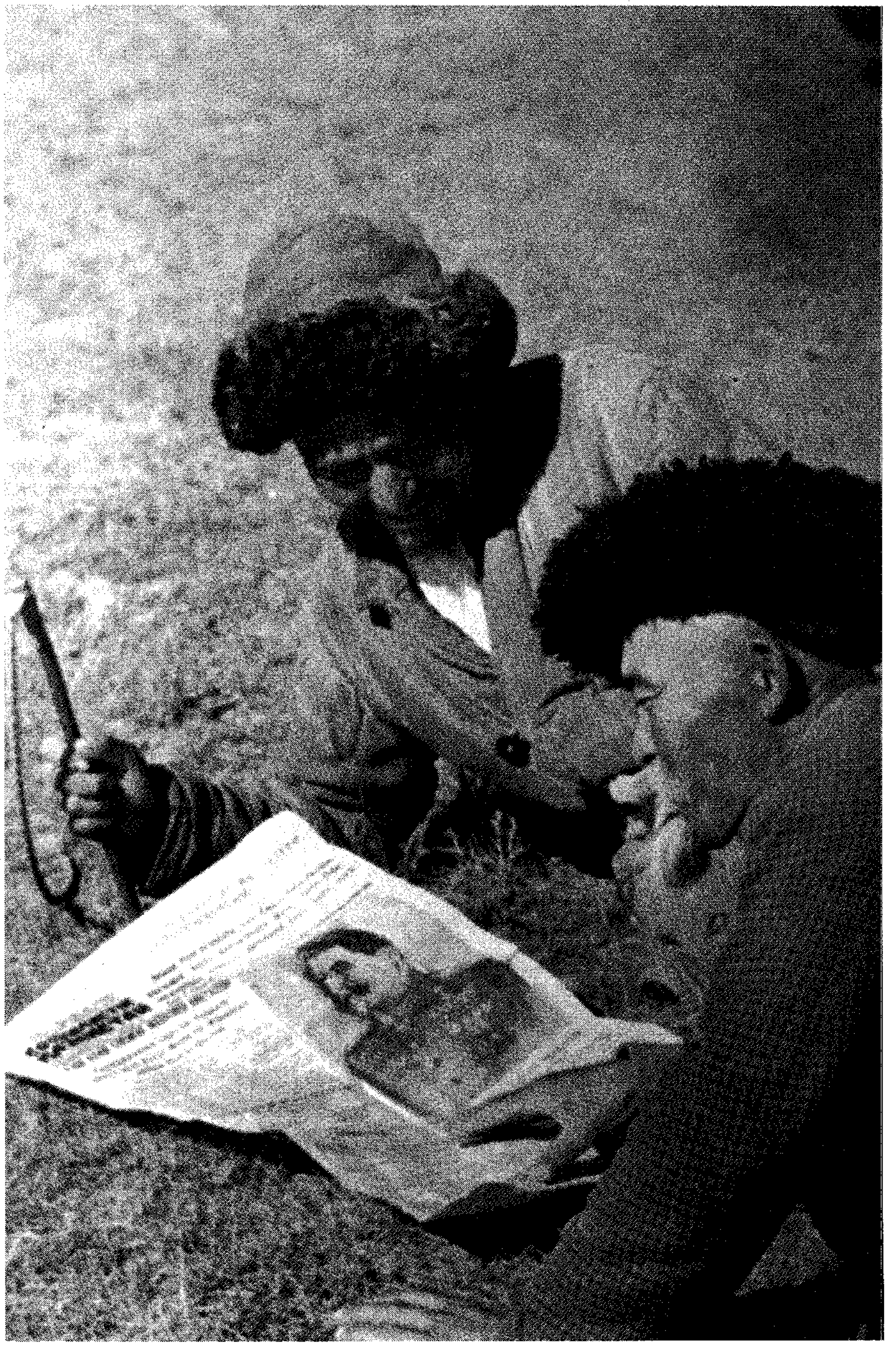
MUSEUM OF ARTS & DESIGN
40 W. 53rd St. (212-956-3535)—Founded in 1993 by a designer and an art historian, the Dutch collective Droog Design is a curated housewares collection that foregrounds simple materials, clean lines, and sly humor. (The word "droog" means dry, as in wit.) **"Simply Droog: 10 + 3 Years of Creating Innovation and Discussion"** accordingly showcases such clever décor as a naked light bulb in a stick-on blister pack, to be moved around like a clip light sans clip. There's an elegant cabinet made of wooden slats recycled from orange crates, a patio umbrella of green nylon leaves, and a toilet-and-bidet set, each sheathed in cushy blue silicone. Through Jan. 14. (Open daily, 10 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Black Style Now."** Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"Willing to Be Lucky: Ambitious New Yorkers in the Pages of *Look* Magazine."** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"It's in the Bag: Purses from the Permanent Collection."** Through Jan. 28. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Italia! Muse to American Artists."** Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Luminist Horizons: The Art and Collection of James A. Suydam."** Through Dec. 31. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Josef Hoffmann: Interiors, 1902-1913."** Through Feb. 26. (Open Thursdays, and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

NEWARK MUSEUM
49 Washington St., Newark, N.J. (973-596-6550)—**"Masters of American Comics,"** half of a two-part survey of comic art in the twentieth century. (See the Jewish Museum.) Through Jan. 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 12 to 5, and weekends, 10 to 5.)



Georgy Zelma's "Shepherds (Kazakhstan)," in Nailya Alexander's "Turkestan" show.

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Legacies: Contemporary Artists Reflect on Slavery."** The museum's first foray into contemporary art explores an ignoble history. The artists represented include Carrie Mae Weems, Glenn Ligon, Kara Walker, and Fred Wilson. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Elegy in the Dust: September 11 and the Chelsea Jeans Memorial."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—A mini-retrospective for the idiosyncratic British artist who died as the show was being planned, **"John Latham: Time Base and the Universe"** surveys fifty years of painting, sculpture, and film. Latham (1921-2006) had a strong philosophical bent, and his works inquire unapologetically into such issues as the origin of the universe and the nature of God. The book-as-object is a favorite sculptural trope, and volumes are tortured in diverse ways—immobilized in plaster, impaled on glass, or coated in black goo. Latham also invented what he called the "Time Base Roller," a series of abstract paintings on canvas rolled on a mechanical arm, which the viewer can advance or rewind at will. Through Jan. 8. ♦ **"Defamation of Character."** Through Jan. 8. ♦ **"Katrín Sigurdardóttir: High Plane Five."** Through May 7. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

JOHN BALDESSARI
Baldessari gets formalist in this series of digital photographs overpainted with acrylic pigment and collaged into low reliefs. It's as if Hans Arp

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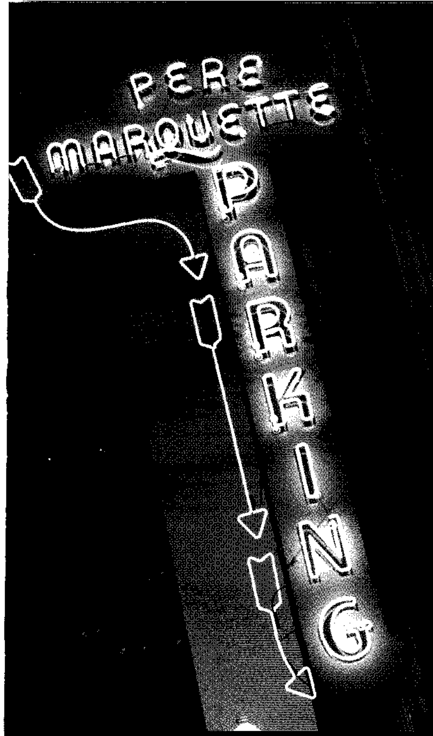

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had abandoned abstraction and turned to newspapers and magazines. Bright hues are painted over faces, hands, and noses, turning them into flat, biomorphic shapes. The artist's newfound interest in breaking through the picture plane is demonstrated in shapes cut out and arranged topographically, so that they pop out or recede into the work—sometimes simultaneously, depending on their hue. The goofy element is all those bright, semi-abstracted noses hanging aloft in space. Baldessari claims they're antidotes to human representations, where "faces become clichés." The effect here seems almost like parody, with the artist mocking his own efforts to seriously examine form. Through Nov. 25. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

RICHARD ESTES
Photo-Realism's reputation fell on hard times in the eighties, and minimalism has remained the dominant story of late-sixties and early-seventies formalist art. But younger painters are rediscovering Estes and his peers, and forcing viewers to question why Gerhard Richter and company should be revered and American painting that addressed similar issues about photography and representation ignored. Estes's prints are particularly striking for their contemporary look and appeal. With their flat, muted colors and cool views of depopulated urban scenes, they resemble digitally based paintings produced by a recent Yale M.F.A. Younger painters like Brian Alfred or Benjamin Edwards immediately come to mind. The kick, naturally, is that, despite their slick, up-to-date look, Estes's prints are silk screens forged in the dark, pre-Photoshop era of the seventies and eighties. Through Dec. 9. (Susan Sheehan, 20 W. 57th St. 212-489-3331.)

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG
Photographs of trucks and motels and roadside curiosities, blown up and transferred to polylaminate-wrapped aluminum panels, are juxtaposed with cascading water, bathing beauties, and down-at-the-heels urban interiors. Rauschenberg, in his first show of new work since a triumphant, if exhaustive, exhibition of his "Combines" at the Met last year, is up to his old tricks. His roving, ironic eye is still his greatest asset, and the pieces look built to last, unlike canvases of yore, corroded and encrusted with magazine tear sheets and taxidermied animals. Looking at these works, with their artfully pre-aged surfaces and methodology explained in a thousand art history books, is like stepping into a time warp. Is it 1966 or 2006? Does it matter? Hell, it's *Rauschenberg*. Through Nov. 25. (PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292.)

"L.A. OBJECT" / DAVID HAMMONS
A dispersed art culture, with African-Americans, Asians, and Chicanos working outside the nascent sixties L.A. gallery context, the civil-rights movement, the Watts riots, and important exhibitions of Schwitters, Duchamp, and Joseph Cornell are cited as inspirations for the work in "L.A. Object." You can actually see it in the assemblages of Betye Saar, George Herms, Edward Kienholz, and John Outterbridge. David Hammons, generally considered a New Yorker, also got his start in this context. His "Body Prints," from the late sixties and seventies, feature imprints of nearly every appendage and surface of the artist's body. They're not as exciting as the scruffy assemblages in "L.A. Object," but one can still discern the seeds of his later, widely celebrated conceptual work. Through Nov. 22. (Jack Tilton, 8 E. 76th St. 212-737-2221.)

Short List

OLAF OTTO BECKER: Cohen Amador, 41 E. 57th St. 212-759-6740. Through Dec. 9. **JOHN CURRIN:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Dec. 22. **LUCIAN FREUD:** Acquavella, 18 E. 79th St. 212-734-6300. Through Dec. 6. **F. C. GUNDLACH:** Cook, 1063 Madison Ave., at 80th St. 212-737-3550. Through Dec. 21. **MARILYN MINTER:** Salon 94, 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212. Through Dec. 20. **ABELARDO MORELL:** Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007. Through Dec. 2. **SARAH MORRIS:** Lever House, 390 Park Ave., at 53rd St. For more information, see www.publicartfund.org. Through Dec. 3. **ROBERT POLIDORI:** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070. Through Dec. 23. **SIGMAR POLKE:** Michael Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through Jan. 13. **FRANZ ROH:** Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-753-4444. Through Dec. 22. **NORBERT SCHWONTKOWSKI:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-744-7400. Through Nov. 22. **CHARLES H. TRAUB:** Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868. Through Dec. 2. **ADAM VAN DOREN:** Renaissance Studios, 130 W. 57th St. 212-586-8342. Through Dec. 6. **NEIL WELLIVER:** Alexandre, 41 E. 57th St. 212-755-2828. Through Nov. 25. **ANDREW WYETH:** Adelson, 19 E. 82nd St. 212-439-6800. Through Dec. 22. **"HEROINES":** Arnold and Marie Schwartz Gallery, Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000. Through May, 2007. **"TURKESTAN: ORIENTALISM IN SOVIET AVANT-GARDE PHOTOGRAPHY":** Nailya Alexander, 24 W. 57th St. 212-315-2211. Through Dec. 23.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

VALÉRIE BELIN
Belin, a French photographer who appears to be making an inventory of the world (including bodybuilders, discarded computers, Michael Jackson impersonators, and crashed cars), shows twelve big new color pictures that look at first like the continuation of an earlier series on department-store mannequins. But her subjects are flesh and blood: male and female models whose unnatural perfection is exaggerated by makeup, lighting, and a pitch-black background that throws these bare-shouldered busts into high relief. If they look convincingly real, it's only because we've assumed they're either top-of-the-line dummies or computer concoctions. But they're simply not believable as human beings. Through Dec. 2. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

JOHN BOCK
The artist as clown or madman is a time-honored pose that Bock adopted early in his career. He appears here in video shot in a cluttered apartment, doing nutty and nauseating things with food and a human skeleton that recall the late-sixties/early-seventies antics of Paul McCarthy and Bruce Nauman. The other part of the show is a "sculptural environment," in which viewers climb a spiral staircase and go through a hole in the roof to witness the remains of a video shoot that took place the week before the show opened. (The resulting video is projected—on a handkerchief, no less—downstairs.) The waiver visitors must sign before ascending undercuts a bit of the boundary-busting transgression; even court jesters have to submit to the law of the land. Through Nov. 25. (Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663.)

MARCO BRAMBILLA
Brambilla's three-screen video samples short takes—some no more than one frame—from various filmic sources, juxtaposing a strobing series of audience-reaction shots with a barrage of movie fights and an onslaught of explicit love scenes. Soundtracked with booming percussion, the triptych can't help drawing one's attention, though its message—we like to look at sex and violence!—isn't exactly gripping. More interesting (or perhaps just a welcome respite) is a slow and hyperrealist animation that simulates footage from the moon landing of Apollo 11 in the Sea of Tranquility, in 1969. Through Nov. 25. (Cohan & Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave. 212-206-8710.)

DAN FLAVIN
On May 25, 1963, Dan Flavin (1933-96) hung an eight-foot fluorescent tube at a forty-five-degree angle on his studio wall. He called it "the diagonal of personal ecstasy," and the discovery guided his work from then on. Four such light sculptures dating from 1963 to 1987 are on view here, along with a series of quick but elegant sketches. An eight-tube red construction lights the front gallery, and studies in pink, green, and yellow-and-red fill

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the barnlike back space with their colored spill. Already a quaint, old-technology aura surrounds the objects, and one can feel nostalgia for the twentieth century setting in. Through Dec. 22. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

CHRISTIAN JANKOWSKI

Jankowski is like an artist-anthropologist, insinuating himself into subcultures as varied as a Texas evangelical church, professional magic circles, and the New York gallery business. Now he's infiltrated the world of scary movies, taping participants at a horror convention in Chicago as they describe—while dressed in elaborate, often fake-blood-spattered costumes—what they would like to inflict on the person who most "betrayed, harmed, or offended" them. This orgy of verbal violence is set in counterpoint to another video in which stagy scenarios are accompanied by film-theory quotes musing on horror cinema's relationship to consumerism and morality. Finally, a short 16-mm. film finds Jankowski playing chess—à la René Clair's 1924 film of Duchamp and Man Ray on a Paris rooftop—with a man dressed as Frankenstein's monster. Through Dec. 9. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

RAY JOHNSON

Johnson studied with Josef Albers at Black Mountain College in the forties, and rubbed shoulders in New York's downtown art-ferment with Cage and Cunningham, Johns and Warhol, Ono and Paik. When he dropped out of the scene, he continued to make collages and mail art addressed to his friends. "En Rapport" presents nearly fifty of these oblique portraits (dating from the late fifties to the early nineties), a previously unseen cache of work, and the reclusive genius does it again. Name-dropping from Claude Monet to Martin Luther King, grafting his signature bunny over the face of Mona Lisa in a shout-out to Duchamp, mixing snakes, kittens, and star charts with Louise Nevelson and Tab Hunter: one wonders how many more wonders wait in the Johnson estate. Through Dec. 23. (Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 212-929-0500.)

YAYOI KUSAMA

An obsession with polka dots, netted patterns, and flowers that reportedly manifested itself in childhood hallucinations continues to inform Kusama's work. New paintings of "Infinity Nets"—fields of interlocking cells set against or merging with monochromatic backgrounds—rehash her work from the sixties, just as a stuffed fabric network of "nerves" hanging from the ceiling recalls her early snaky, scruffy soft sculptures. The best work is elsewhere. Two boxes with mirrored interiors create for the viewer a kind of virtual fun house, while another work, carrying the facile title "Ladder to Heaven," uses glowing fibre-optic cables extended vertically between two mirrored disks in a darkened room, perhaps to re-create one of Kusama's wild juvenile visions. Through Nov. 25. (Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 212-366-4774.)

PAUL LEE

Assemblages featuring painted soda cans, stitched-together washcloths, and colored light bulbs preponderate in Lee's exhibition. According to the press release, these items demonstrate that "love is an endless natural reservoir which we should be able to access freely and abundantly. Unfortunately . . ." Indeed. The bits of faded towel express a tatty grace, and some of the sculptures strike a pleasing balance with dross and elegance. Others don't. More successful is a series of small three-dimensional collages, in which the same black-and-white image of a handsome young man's face is variously cut and decorated with tiny crystal balls. Through Dec. 16. (Audiello, 526 W. 26th St. 212-675-9082.)

NEETA MADAHAR / BIRGITTA LUND

In a two-woman exhibition whose priorities seem to be flipped, Madahar occupies the main space with large color photographs of wing-like sycamore seeds tumbling through space. A slow-motion video emphasizes the work's dreamy, exhilarating sensuality, but one pretty image goes a long way. Lund's on-the-road landscapes, in the smaller gallery, have more weight. Even if you don't know they were made in the course of a post-9/11 move from the U.S. to Denmark, these shots of Times Square, a green coastline, a traffic tunnel, and a gas station at night evoke the restless, anxious traveller. Although Lund's "In Transit" project needs more space to really cast its spell, this excerpt captures the watchful but distracted mood. Through Nov. 25. (Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.)

STEVE MUMFORD

Mumford's tours of Iraq—he went as an artist embedded in various U.S. military units—have yielded a substantial body of work, and his muted watercolors of U.S. soldiers, Iraqis, and deceptively placid Baghdad street scenes have drawn a good deal of attention. But the oil paintings here, drawn from source photographs and painted in a competent Photo-Realism, don't have the same power as the watercolors. Mumford maintains the same evenhanded position ("These aren't antiwar paintings. They aren't political"), but the sketchy, reportorial spontaneity is gone, and, despite his attempt to capture the addictive excitement of war, these works feel stilted, academic, and a bit sensationalist. Through Dec. 2. (Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 212-727-3323.)

ERNESTO NETO

If you don't have a small child, borrow one to guide you through Neto's new installation. As in his previous works, the piece requires taking off one's shoes and entering a padded, gauzy enclosure not unlike a chic moon bounce—in this case, a U-shaped tent made of sherbet-tinted cotton. Hot-colored beanbags in amoebic shapes are strewn on the cushy floor, rearranged by each successive visitor. The intra-organ uncanniness that attended some of Neto's earlier works has been given a cutesy finish that doesn't fully work conceptually, but it's entertaining and peaceful at the same time. Through Nov. 25. (Bonakdar, 521 W. 21st St. 212-414-4144.)

CHRISTIAN PATTERSON / DON DONAGHY

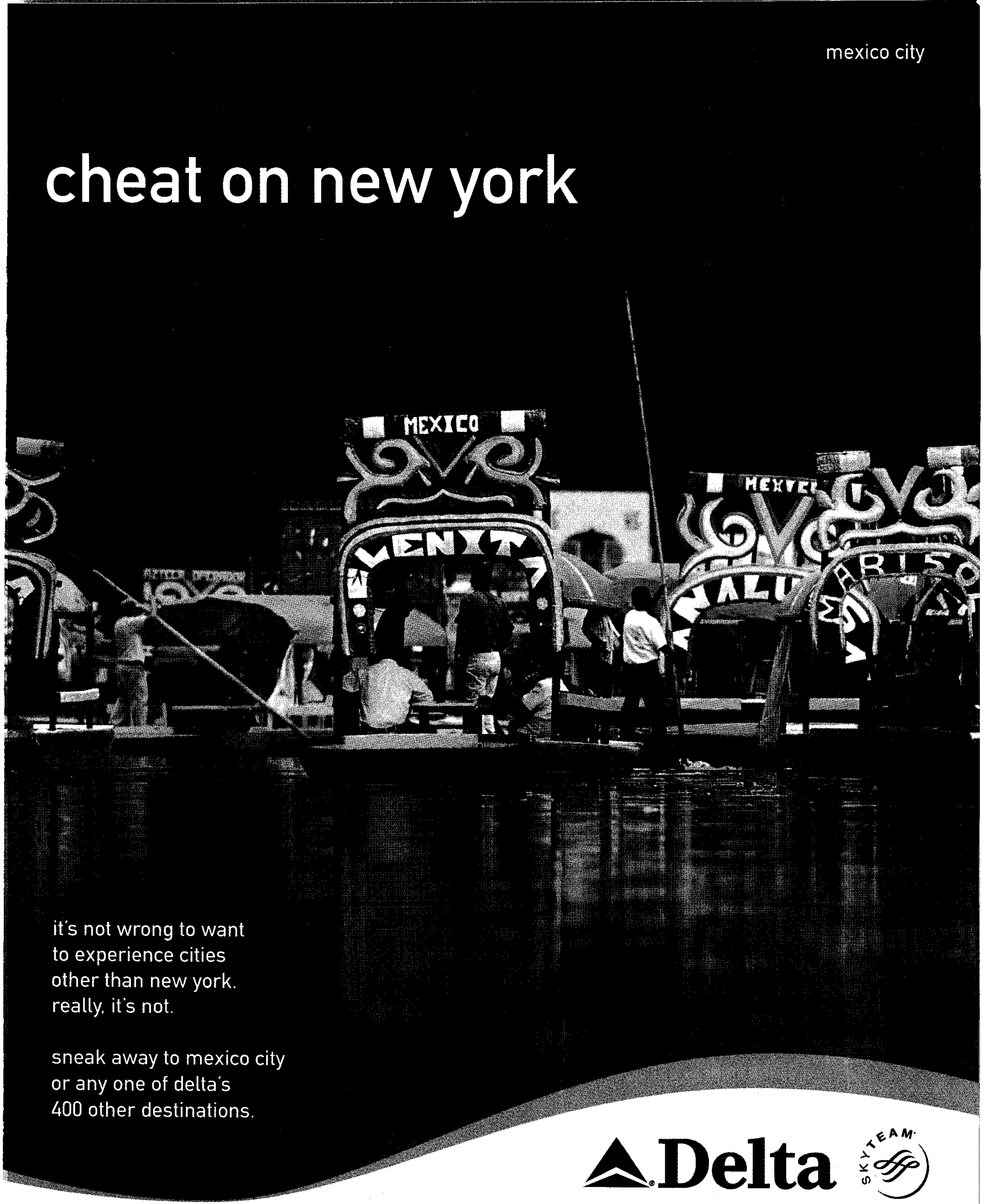
Patterson's photographs of Memphis juke joints and other neon-lit hangouts have enough Southern charm and garish color to edge them into Eggleston territory, but they're upstaged here by a far more modest show of Donaghy's black-and-white work from the early nineteen-sixties. At seventy, Donaghy is being rediscovered yet again; in 1992, Jane Livingston included him in what she dubbed photography's New York School, and his glancing, grainy images will remind viewers of School-mates Robert Frank, Leon Levinstein, and Saul Leiter. His tight little street scenes have a melancholy atmosphere; whether mired or drifting, these men and women seem unaware, out of touch. Through Nov. 25. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

ANGELA STRASSHEIM

A spate of shows by female photographers whose work is staged and/or fabricated finds this popular strategy frayed by overuse, if not entirely played out. Strassheim, who was included in the last Whitney Biennial, fills her second solo show with pictures that are so fictitious they might be storybook illustrations. Her subjects are girls of all ages, from quite young children (one straddles her father's lap in a doctor's waiting room; another gets spanked) to randy teens (a budding Lolita lounges on the lawn; her older sister is passed out naked in bed), and empathy is not the problem. But a sense of sisterhood isn't enough to bring these pictures to life; their artifice stifles all but the most obvious emotions. Through Dec. 2. (Marvelli, 526 W. 26th St. 212-627-3363.)

CATHERINE YASS

Filmed in the controversial Three Gorges Dam, on China's Yangtze River, Yass's double-screen film "Lock" is projected on facing walls; one image was filmed from the front of a boat looking into the immense portals of the dam's lock, while the other looks backward from the stern toward open water. Hypnotically slow takes construct the passage as a dream in which the massive concrete emplacement takes on the quality of a temple or ancient city. A series of accompanying photographs mounted in light boxes overlay positive transparencies on altered neg-



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atives; part of each image of river traffic appears in color, with other parts ghosted to fog. Through Dec. 9. (Lelong, 528 W. 26th St. 212-315-0470.)

"TRIBUTE TO CÉZANNE"
The centenary of Cézanne's death occasions an eclectic tribute. Several small works on paper represent the Master, including a stern yet voluptuous study (1896-97) after his earlier "Baigneurs au Repos" and a funny little etching of a man in a bowler hat with a tiny man on a gallows floating above him like a thought. These historical entries are jostled, jeered, and encouraged by the presence of (among others) a huge C-print by Thomas Struth showing dense Peruvian jungle; a skinny-dipping couple photographed by Nan Goldin; a suite of drawings on collaged vellum by Francis Alÿs; and a series of watercolors by Spencer Finch, each featuring a graduated palette of color swatches that represent a mountain, a flower, a blue spruce, and other plein-air stalwarts. Through Nov. 30. (Lambert, 564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611.)

Short List

JASON BROOKS: Holm, 524 W. 24th St. 212-627-7444. Through Dec. 22. **TIM EITEL:** PaceWildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through Jan. 20. **TIERNEY GEARON:** Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Through Nov. 25. **MAUREEN GALLACE:** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Dec. 22. **ARTURO HERRERA:** Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262. Through Nov. 25. **ELLSWORTH KELLY:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St., 523 W. 24th St., and 526 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through Jan. 27. **MARY MISS:** Senior & Shopmaker, 21 E. 26th St. 212-213-6767. Through Nov. 22. **ENOC PÉREZ:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 536 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through Nov. 25. **FIONA RAE:** PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258. Through Dec. 2. **CINDY SHERMAN:** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100. Through Dec. 16. **JENNIFER STEINKAMP:** Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923. Through Nov. 25. **HIROSHI SUGIMOTO:** Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 212-627-1018. Through Dec. 9. **ANDY WARHOL:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. and 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1111. Through Dec. 22.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
When we hear the words "Herr Drosselmeier," most of us automatically think of Balanchine's 1954 version of "The Nutcracker," with its magical tree, travelling bed, and the battle between the dashing boy soldiers and the three-headed mouse king. Once again this season, at the New York State Theatre, Marie slays the evil king with her slipper, and the snowflake maidens waltz in the wintry forest. (Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Nov. 24 at 8, Nov. 25 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 26 at 1 and 5. Through Dec. 30.)

LIMÓN DANCE COMPANY
In a trio of sixtieth-anniversary programs, the company's current generation is guided by such former Limón pupils as its artistic director, Carla Maxwell, who re-creates masterworks like "The Moor's Pavane" and "A Choreographic Offering," and Lar Lubovitch, whose "Recordare" (2005) pays homage to Limón's Mexican roots. The final evening, a tribute to Doris Humphrey, includes a revival of Humphrey's 1946 "Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías" staged by the Limón alumna Sarah Stackhouse. (175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Nov. 21-22 at 7:30, Nov. 24 at 8, Nov. 25 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 26 at 2 and 7:30.)

DADA VON BZDÜLÖW THEATRE
In international dance circles, there's a lot of buzz about what's happening in Poland lately, but little of that action makes it to these shores. For its U.S. début, this Polish trio brings "Several Witty Observations," which finds its inspiration in the writings of the Polish ironist Witold Gombrowicz. Like those writings, the dance feels both impudent and gnomic. Although it approaches slapstick, the absurdity is subtle, as the dancers lounge on air mattresses and watch each other, trying on each other's costumes and personae. (La Mama E.T.C., 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Nov. 24-26 at 7:30.)

Rachel Weisz in Darren Aronofsky's "The Fountain."

RICCARDO VECCHIO

BALLET PRELJOCAJ
The superb company directed by the French experimental choreographer Angelin Preljocaj returns with two of his fluid, attention-grabbing dances. In his hard-driving "Noces" (from 1989; recently restaged), Stravinsky's urgent cantata underscores a brutally ritualistic peasant wedding, in which the brides—creepy, life-size dummies—are tossed around, flopping grotesquely in the air. "Empty Moves (Part 1)," a New York première, is set to an excerpt from John Cage's words-as-pure-sound collage "Empty Words," as recorded live at Milan's Teatro Lirico in 1977. While the crowd in the recording jeers and hollers, four simply dressed dancers progress through a graceful, clean alphabet of poses and steps, matching the imperturbable rhythms of Cage's steady voice. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Nov. 28 at 7:30. Through Dec. 3.)

LUIS LARA MALVACÍAS
Malvacías, who was born in Venezuela, is a dancer, choreographer, visual artist, and designer; these elements come together in his dance works, which are part performance, part installation. For his newest piece, "There Is No Such Thing," the "thing" being refuted is linear structure; the work consists of twenty-one short, self-sufficient sections that alternate between explosive, earthy movement, deconstructions of phrases and words, and clever manipulations of objects. In one striking segment, a tall dancer, her arms, back, chest, neck, and hands encumbered with large bags—so that she almost disappears—attempts a complex series of steps, leg raises, and jumps, her efforts at once comical, surreal, and strangely poignant. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Nov. 28 at 7:30. Through Dec. 2.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

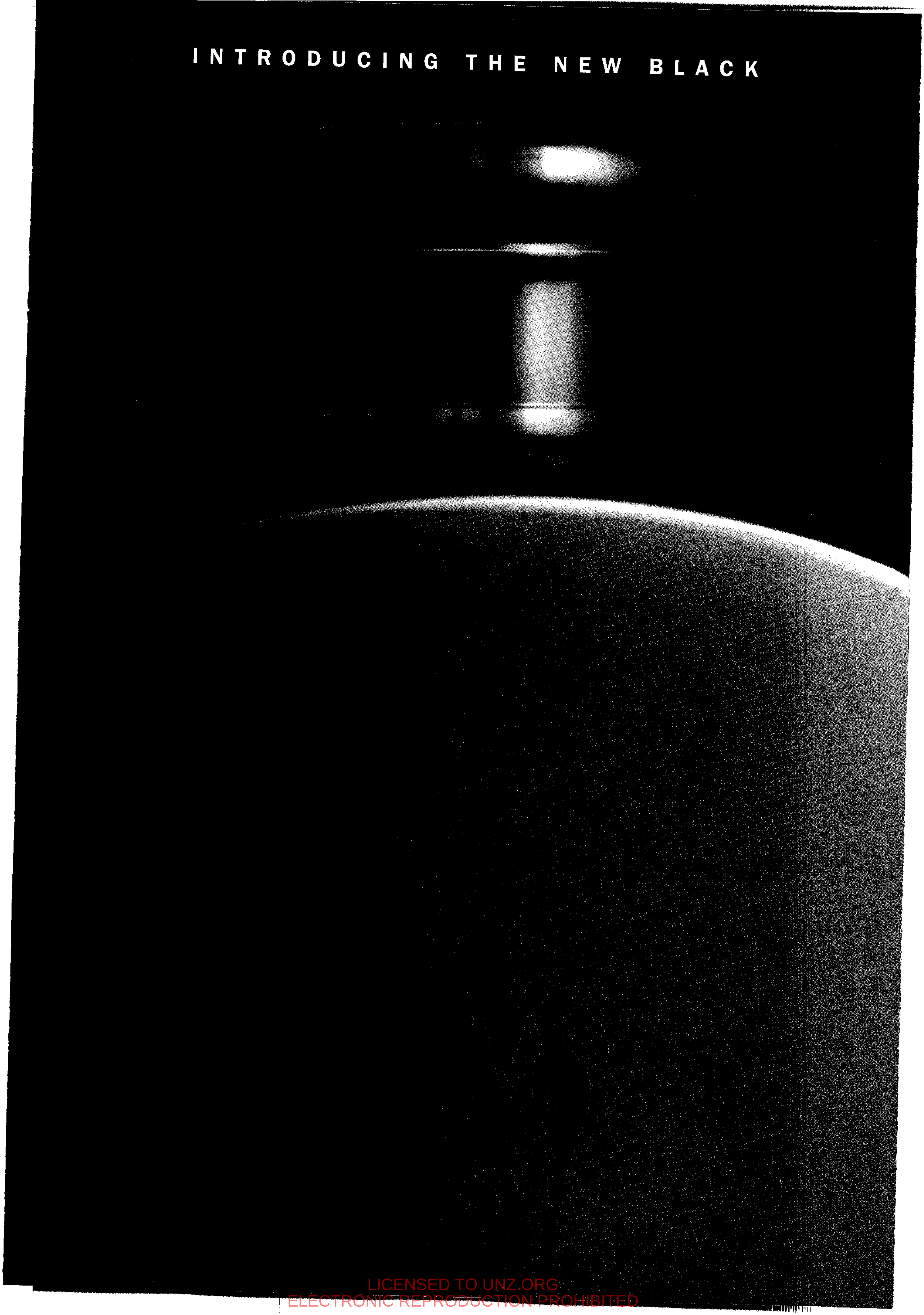
METROPOLITAN OPERA
The gloriously archaic Zeffirelli production of **"Tosca,"** with Andrea Gruber, Walter Fraccaro, and James Morris; Nicola Luisotti, an impressive addition to the Met roster, conducts. (Nov. 22 at 7:30.) ♦ With Aprile Millo, a grand diva of the old school, replacing Gruber. (Nov. 25 and Nov. 28 at 8.) ♦ The Met's **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia"** was more than due for a makeover, and in hiring the Broadway director Bartlett Sher to create a new production Peter Gelb has hit his second home run of the season. By surrounding the orchestra pit with a rectangular stage extension, he brings the cast out into the auditorium and creates a new level of intimacy with the audience—with no loss of musical quality. Juan Diego Flórez and Diana Damrau dispatch Rossini's coloratura fireworks with assured style and gleaming sounds, but the real triumph of the evening belongs to Peter Mattei, whose swaggering (and flawlessly sung) Figaro has finally made him a house star; Maurizio Benini's conducting gives the score plenty of sparkle and verve. (Nov. 24 and Nov. 27 at 8.) ♦ **"La Bohème,"** with Angela Marambio, Susannah Glanville, Rolando Villazón, and Peter Coleman-Wright in the leading roles; Plácido Domingo, making one of his occasional moves from stage to podium, conducts. (Nov. 25 at 1:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

AMATO OPERA: "RIGOLETTO"
Those looking for a feisty rendition of Verdi's melodrama in true Italian hilltown style can head to the company's tiny theatre on the Lower East Side to take in a performance by a hardy mix of professionals and amateurs (under the direction of the company's patriarch, Anthony Amato). (319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Nov. 24-25 at 7:30 and Nov. 26 at 2:30. These are the final performances.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Having returned from its Asian tour, Lorin Maazel and his orchestra bring some of their repertory back with them—Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini (with the young Korean pianist Joyce Yang) and Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, "Eroica." (Nov. 24-25 at 8 and Nov. 28 at 7:30.) ♦ Note: Maazel will conduct the "Eroica" during a Saturday-matinée concert that will also feature a performance (by the pianist Gerald Robbins and the Philharmonic's concertmaster, Glenn Dicterow, among others) of Shostakovich's Piano Quintet. (Nov. 25 at 2.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Another Philharmonic comes to town this week—London's, along with its principal conductor, Kurt Masur, who used to run things on New York's side of the pond. (There's even overlapping repertory.) Nov. 27 at 8: The distinguished pianist Elisabeth Leonskaja joins Masur and the orchestra in Prokofiev's seldom heard Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, the center of a program bookended by Liszt's "Les Préludes" and Brahms's Symphony No. 2 in D Major. ♦ Nov. 28 at 8: Sibelius's Violin Concerto (featuring the magnetic soloist Sarah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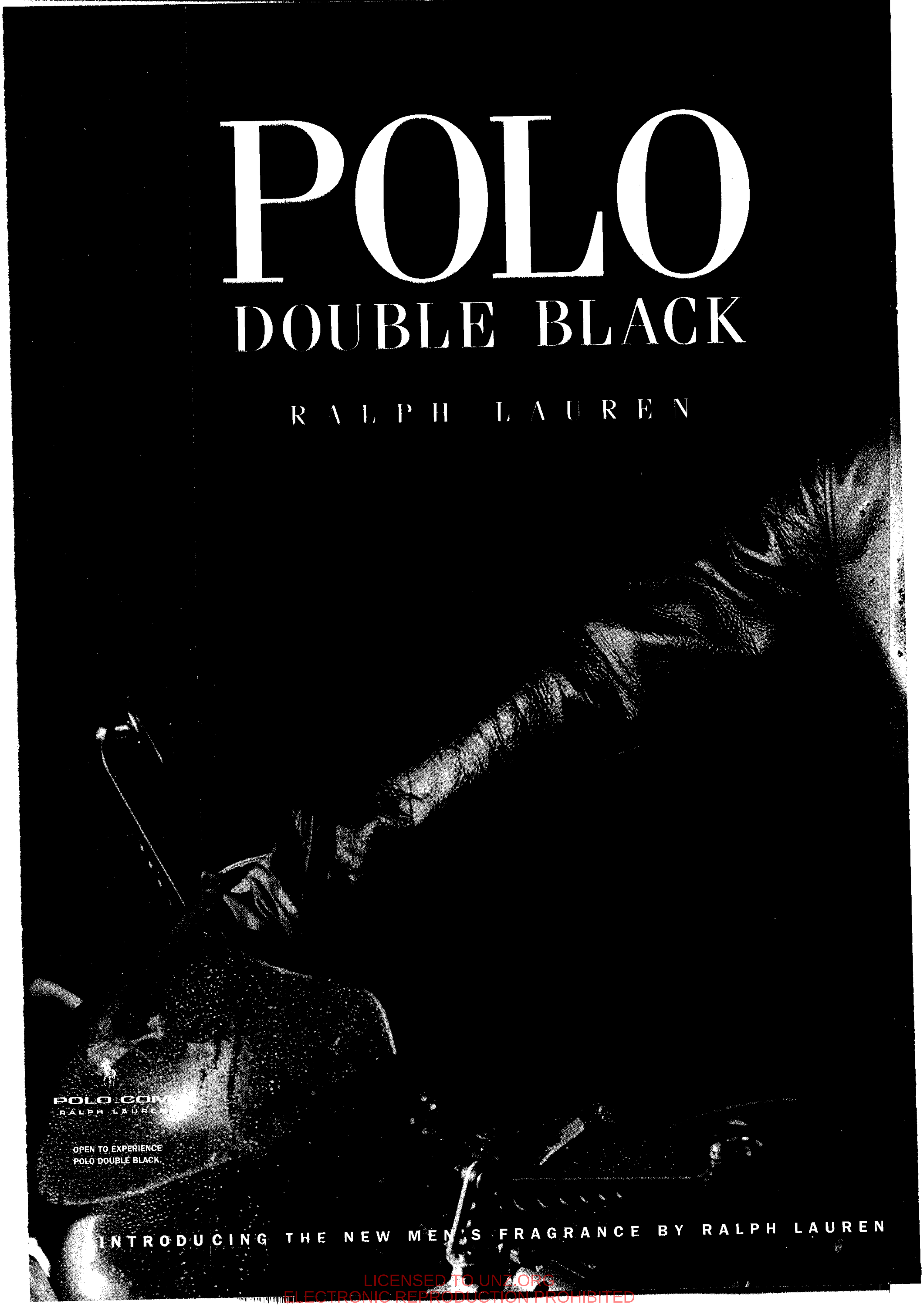
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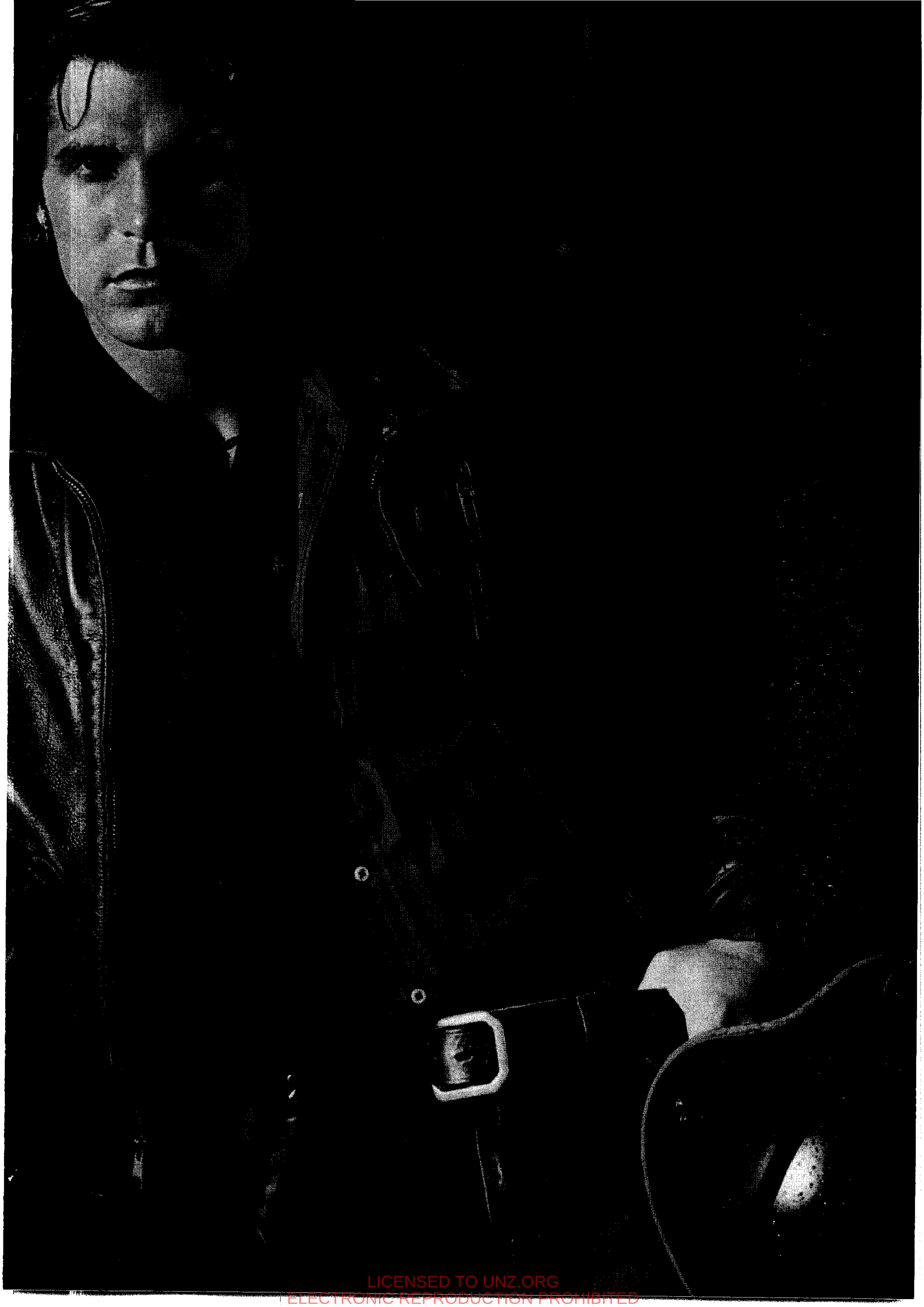

Chang) precedes Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)

BACH VESPERS AT HOLY TRINITY

In one of New York's longest-running series, Rick Erickson, the cantor of this Lutheran congregation, leads performances of the Bach Cantatas on Sunday evenings with his small professional choir and a period-instrument ensemble. This service features one of the great ones, the Cantata No. 26, "Ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig." (Central Park W. at 65th St. Nov. 26 at 5. A donation is suggested.)

RECITALS

MIDTOWN CONCERTS

Nov. 22 at 1:15: The flutist Immanuel Davis, a noted specialist in Baroque style who teaches at the University of Minnesota, joins two of the series's regulars, the gambist Lisa Terry and the harpsichordist Gwendolyn Toth, to perform works by Telemann, Morel, and Hotteterre. ♦ Nov. 29 at 1:15: Artek, the admired period-performance group in residence at the Church of St. Francis of Assisi, offers a concert of Baroque cantatas by Handel ("Mi palpita il cor") and Mouret ("Andromède et Persée") featuring the tenor Philip Anderson. (135 W. 31st St. No tickets required.)

BARGEMUSIC

The pianist Steven Beck is the mainstay of three programs at the floating chamber-music series. Nov. 23 at 7:30: The violinist Peter Winograd and the cellist Wolfram Koessel join Beck for piano trios by Haydn and Schubert (in B-Flat Major, Op. 99); in between, Beck will stand down while the two string players sink their teeth into Ravel's tempestuous Sonata for Violin and Cello. ♦ Nov. 24 at 8:30: In a low-priced "Cushion Concert," Jesse Mills replaces Winograd on violin for an evening of trios by Shostakovich (the rarely performed Piano Trio No. 1, Op. 8), Bright Sheng, and Chick Corea, teaming up with Beck for Ives's Violin Sonata No. 4 ("Children's Day at the Camp Meeting"). ♦ Nov. 25 at 7:30 and Nov. 26 at 4: The Manhattan String Quartet—one of the first American groups to explore Shostakovich's lesser-known quartets—embarks on a program of works by Ives and Smetana (the Quartet No. 1, "From My Life"), joining the invaluable Beck for Korngold's Piano Quintet in E Major. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM: ELISABETH LEONSKAJA

The admired Russian-born pianist, a longtime resident of Vienna, offers a recital in the Forum's sleek little concert hall (in advance of her performance with the London Philharmonic) that features not only sonatas by Mozart and Beethoven (the Sonata in C Minor, Op. 111) but also Tchaikovsky's rarely heard Grand Sonata in G Major. (11 E. 52nd St. Nov. 24 at 8. To reserve free tickets, which are required, call 212-319-5300, ext. 222.)

THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER TRIO

Elaine Comparone, the harpsichordist and queen bee of the Queen's Chamber Band, joins two colleagues (the violinist Robert Zubrycki and the cellist Peter Seidenberg) to perform trios by Haydn and Beethoven (in E-Flat Major, Op. 1, No. 1) along with Beethoven's Sonata for Cello and Keyboard in G Minor, another product of his early career. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 26 at 2.)

URSULA OPPENS AND JEROME LOWENTHAL

Two of the city's superlative pianists, regular duo partners, come to Queens to offer music by Schubert, Liszt ("Réminiscenses de 'Don Juan,' " in the two-piano version), and Bartók (the Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, with the assistance of Michael Lipsey). (LeFrak Concert Hall, Queens College, 65-30 Kissena Boulevard, Flushing. 718-997-3802. Nov. 28 at 10 A.M.)

CALDER QUARTET

Formed in Los Angeles, this superb young ensemble is currently in residence at Juilliard. Accordingly, they offer the faculty composer Christopher Rouse's String Quartet No. 1 along with works by Beethoven (the complex yet diverting Quartet in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2) and Shostakovich (the riveting final quartet, No. 15 in E-Flat Minor). (Alice Tully Hall. Nov. 28 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

MOVIES OPENING

BACKSTAGE

A drama, directed by Emmanuelle Bercot, about a teen-age girl (Isild Le Besco) and her obsession with a pop star (Emmanuelle Seigner). In French. Opening Nov. 22. (Film Forum.)

DECK THE HALLS

In this comedy, Danny (Danny DeVito) strings his house with lots of Christmas lights, and his neighbor (Matthew Broderick) doesn't like it. Directed by John Whitesell. Opening Nov. 22. (In wide release.)

DÉJÀ VU

An action drama, directed by Tony Scott, set in post-Katrina New Orleans. Starring Denzel Washington, Val Kilmer, and Paula Patton. Opening Nov. 22. (Angelika Film Center.)

THE FOUNTAIN

A time-travel love story about a man's quest for immortality. Directed by Darren Aronofsky; starring Hugh Jackman, Rachel Weisz, and Ellen Burstyn. Opening Nov. 22. (In wide release.)

OPAL DREAM

In this drama, a girl's imaginary friends disappear and her neighbors search for them. Directed by Peter Cattaneo. Opening Nov. 22. (Village East Cinemas.)

ZOHAR LAZAR

TOP DVD BOXED SETS OF 2006

"The Cary Grant Box Set" (Sony)—The jewel of this set is Howard Hawks's 1939 adventure, "Only Angels Have Wings," in which Grant stars as the head of a crew of ramshackle flyers at the port of Barranca, Colombia. Jean Arthur plays his new flame, and a young, combustible Rita Hayworth (in her first major role) plays his ex. The box also features Hawks's rapid-fire talkfest "His Girl Friday" and George Cukor's "Holiday" (co-starring Katharine Hepburn), a blithe warmup for "The Philadelphia Story."

"Essential Art House—50 Years of Janus Films" (Criterion)—Alongside the overfamiliar and the inessential, the fifty movies in this set include such masterworks as Eisenstein's "Ivan the Terrible, Part II," Renoir's "The Rules of the Game," Mizoguchi's "Ugetsu," Tati's "M. Hulot's Holiday," Antonioni's "L'Avventura," and other instant classics that were imported by Janus at a time when foreign films were anything but commonplace. (Ermanno Olmi's "Il Posto," from 1961, is a pleasant surprise.) Peter Cowie's essay in the lavish coffee-table book that's included explains just how that company, started in 1956 by two young Harvard grads, did it.

"Film Noir Classic Collection, Vol. 3" (Warner)—One of the most powerful of all films noirs, Nicholas Ray's "On Dangerous Ground," from 1952, features Robert Ryan as a cop seething with rage and hatred who finds redemption in the arms of a blind woman (Ida Lupino). The set also includes Anthony Mann's "Border Incident," about undercover agents battling an immigrant-smuggling ring.

"Glamour Girls" (Kino)—This offbeat set features Josef von Sternberg's English-language version of "The Blue Angel," starring Marlene Dietrich as the night-club vamp and Emil Jannings as the lovestruck professor, which was filmed alongside the familiar German version. "Pandora and the Flying Dutchman" features Ava Gardner in one of her greatest roles, as a free-spirited enchantress. Douglas Sirk's stylish whodunit "Lured" stars Lucille Ball as an American in London and George Sanders as a suspicious Lothario.

"Marilyn Monroe Special Anniversary Collection" (20th Century Fox)—In one box, the diva's greatest musicals: "Let's Make Love," directed by George Cukor, from 1960, featuring a rendition of "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" that ought to be illegal, and "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," from Howard Hawks, with Monroe and Jane Russell as "two little girls from Little Rock" debating whether diamonds are a girl's best friend. "Marilyn Monroe: The Final Days," a documentary about Monroe's last, unfinished work, "Something's Got to Give," proves that at the time of her death, at age thirty-six, she was blossoming as a comedienne. Also includes Billy Wilder's "The Seven Year Itch."

"Preston Sturges: The Filmmaker Collection" (Universal)—With his tender eye for dreamers and schemers who think big and fall on their faces, Sturges offers a secret history of American lunacy. The early forties were his heyday, and this box features seven of his masterworks from that decade, including his first, "The Great McGinty," a comedy of political corruption, and his inside-Hollywood masterpiece, "Sullivan's Travels," starring Joel McCrea as a comedy director who sets out to make a meaningful social drama called "O Brother, Where Art Thou?"

Also noteworthy: **"John Wayne-John Ford Film Collection"** (Warner), featuring the core of Western scripture. **"The Busby Berkeley Collection"** (Warner) contains the five essential Warner Brothers' musicals, including "42nd Street." **"Marlene Dietrich: The Glamour Collection"** (Universal) presents three of her Hollywood collaborations with Josef von Sternberg. **"Johan van der Keuken: The Complete Collection, Vol. 1"** (Facets) is a fascinating trove of documentaries by the late Dutch filmmaker. **"Saturday Night Live: The Complete First Season"** (Universal) foretells decades' worth of new comic paradigms and recalls the era's topical humor and pop music. **"Eric Rohmer's Six Moral Tales"** (Criterion) includes the films with which Rohmer established his tense, exquisite style and his place in the cinematic firmament. **"The Fassbinder Collection II"** (Fantoma) offers a pair of rare features and superb documentary extras. Two-disk sets from Criterion of two classics of feral feminine power, G. W. Pabst's **"Pandora's Box,"** starring Louise Brooks, and Maurice Pialat's **"À Nos Amours,"** starring Sandrine Bonnaire, include interviews with the stars and making-of documentaries.

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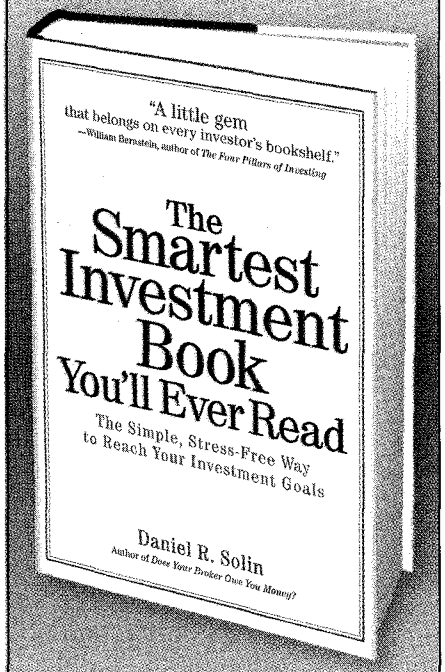
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OUR DAILY BREAD
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Nov. 24. (Anthology Film Archives.)

TENACIOUS D IN THE PICK OF DESTINY
Jack Black and Kyle Gass star in this comedy about a rock duo who set out to steal a legendary guitar pick. Directed by Liam Lynch. Opening Nov. 22. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

BABEL
Alejandro González Iñárritu creates savagely beautiful and heartbreaking images, he gets fearless performances out of his actors, he edits with the sharpest razor inside any computer in Hollywood, and he also abuses his audience with a humorless fatalism and a piling up of calamities that border on the ludicrous. "Babel" is set in Morocco, Tokyo, and both Southern California and northern Mexico. The movie has three stories—all touching on relationships between parents and children—which have been arbitrarily linked together by the will of the director and his collaborator, the screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga. Their theme is the pathos of ignorance. All over the world, terrible things are happening, and we cannot know them or feel them, but an eagle-eyed artist, as he spans the globe, can connect us. As a mood, this globalized empathy is a noble enterprise. As a method of constructing a movie, it's hopeless. With Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett as a couple that gets in trouble in Morocco, Adriana Barraza as their housekeeper and nanny back home with the kids in San Diego, and Rinko Kikuchi as a teen-age girl in Tokyo desperate for the embrace of a man. In French, English, Spanish, Japanese, Berber, and Arabic.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/30/06.) (In wide release.)

BOBBY
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

BORAT
Somewhere inside the sound and fury that have shrouded this project is a short, gross, and very funny series of sketches, lightly knotted together into a modern picaresque. Sacha Baron Cohen, the British performer behind Ali G, brings his yet-more-notorious invention, the Kazakh journalist Borat Sagdiyev, to the United States, where his shameless curiosity, not to mention a reckless indifference to political correctness, is designed to cause maximum offense. The plot, if you can call it that, demands that Borat travel across the country to find Pamela Anderson: a noble quest, even if it does mean putting that distinguished actress in a sack. Some of the time, our hero is accompanied by his manager, Azamat (Ken Davitian), and also by a live bear, although Azamat looks more like a bear than the bear does. There are jokes thrown at Jews, African-Americans, rodeo fans, homosexuals, and, for good measure, the rest of the population. The smart explanation for this is that Baron Cohen, who is Jewish himself, is assaulting intolerance wherever he finds it; what he cannot control is the fate of the film itself, and one wonders whether, to a late-night college audience, say, the irony behind Borat would be of much concern. Could the movie become a safety valve, encouraging its fans to let off steam?—*Anthony Lane* (11/6/06) (In wide release.)

CASINO ROYALE
James Bond returns in a new incarnation. Much of the debate that preceded this twenty-first installment of 007 revolved around the appointment of Daniel Craig to the leading role; a more pressing question was whether the ailing Bond franchise itself deserved to survive. The solution, as controlled by the director Martin Campbell, is to put the narrative on a low-carb diet: no fatty subplots, no indigestible villains, a minimum of frills. Our hero is pure protein, frequently bloodied, and the movie is rich in tenderizing violence; the torture scene, lifted grimly from Ian Fleming's novel, is unfit for younger viewers. The plot requires Bond to outwit Le Chiffre (Mads Mikkelsen), a banker to the world's terrorists; given the film's paucity of gadgets, 007 must rely on his gambling skills, his fists, and the comforting presence of Vesper Lynd (Eva Green), who introduces herself with the words "I'm the money." The movie is ominously long, but, for the first time in many years, we are steered away from silliness towards Fleming's vision of a bitter and undependable world. With Judi Dench as M.—*A.L.* (11/20/06) (In wide release.)

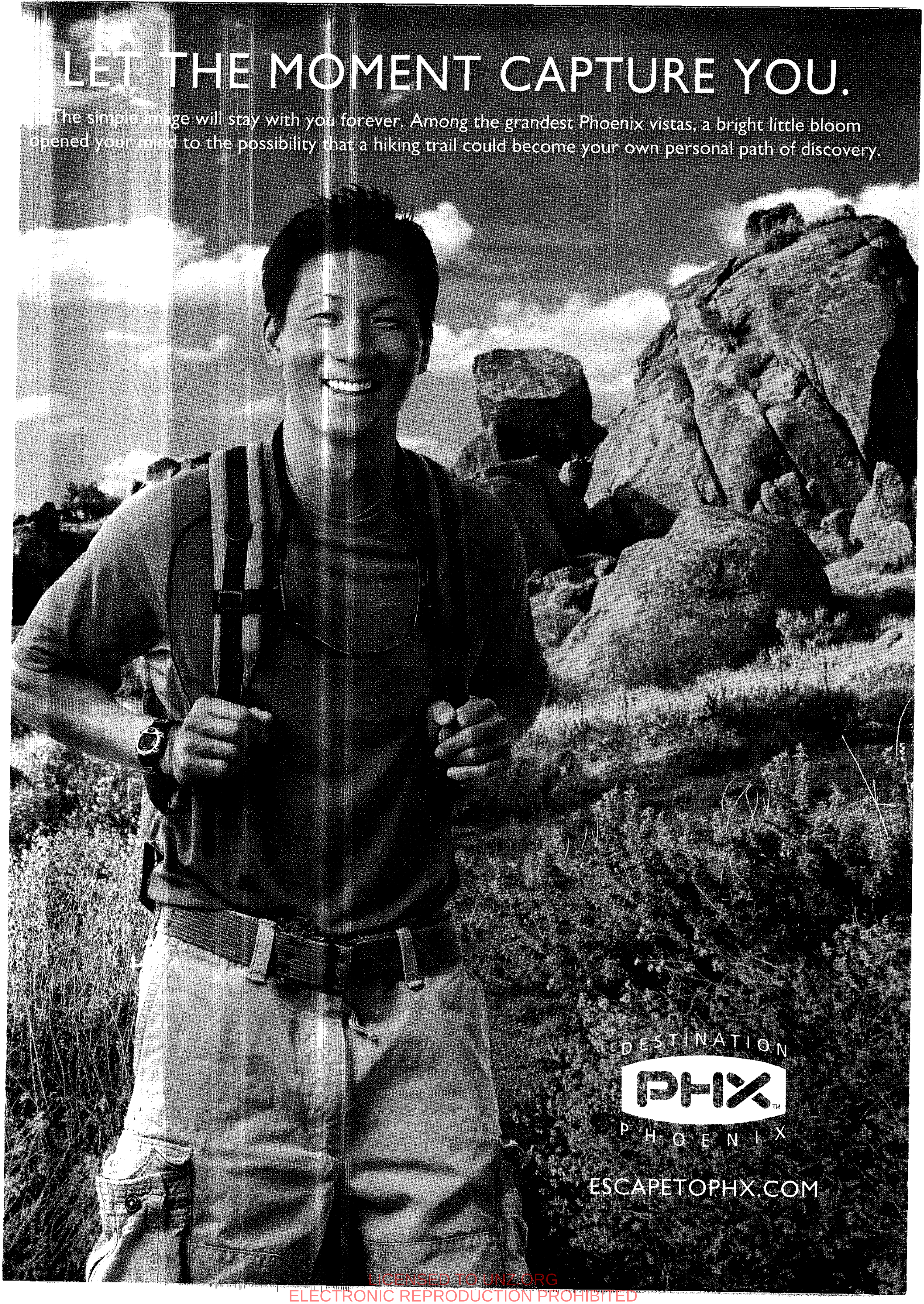
THE DEPARTED
This merrily vicious and violent Martin Scorsese film about cops and gangsters in Boston will never haunt your sleep, as "Taxi Driver" and "Raging Bull" do, but it will keep you excited and amused for well over two hours. A South Boston mobster (Jack Nicholson) recruits a young neighborhood kid and later places him, as a grownup (played by Matt Damon), in the Massachusetts State Police; the police, in turn, place their own undercover guy (Leonardo DiCaprio) in the crime boss's outfit. It's a double-mole story in which the two moles, in the end, wind up hunting each other. "The Departed" is a remake of the Hong Kong thriller "Infernal Affairs," directed by Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, and it has the speed and volatility of a Hong Kong movie. But Scorsese and the screenwriter, William Monahan, have added weight to the story by digging deep into urban tribal lore—the memories of loyalty and betrayal going back decades, the nasty old jokes, the bullying insults and invective. Nicholson doesn't seem to take the movie very seriously—he has a ball singing Irish ditties and making rat faces and holding up severed hands—but everyone else is both disciplined and highly adept at delivering the foulmouthed idiom. With Martin Sheen, Mark Wahlberg, and Alec Baldwin as cops, and Vera Farmiga as a police psychiatrist who is attracted to both young men.—*D.D.* (10/16/06) (In wide release.)

FAST FOOD NATION
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS
Clint Eastwood's ironic epic about the battle of Iwo Jima and its strange aftermath has a fine, sensitive temperament but lacks an emotional payoff. Of the six men who raised the flag on Mt. Suribachi, and who became the anonymous subjects of the most famous photograph of the war, three survived the battle to be called home and paraded around the country as salesmen-heroes in a national War Bond tour. Obsessed with their dead friends, these ordinary guys—John Bradley (Ryan Phillippe), Rene Gagnon (Jesse Bradford), and Ira Hayes (Adam Beach)—faced their public role with varying degrees of pride, nausea, and guilt. The movie has been framed as a search for the truth, yet there is nothing startling, and little that is hidden, to expose. The men were embarrassed by the public fawning over them as heroes, but they also raised a lot of money at a crucial time in the war. The movie is most impressive in its sombre battle scenes, which were mostly shot on a desolate strip of Iceland where the black sand has the same grim look as Iwo Jima's mangled turf. Eastwood and the cinematographer, Tom Stern, drained all the color out of the shots except for the thick, red stains of blood.—*D.D.* (10/30/06) (In wide release.)

FLUSHED AWAY
The swankiest sewer system ever put on film belongs to this computer-animated bauble about a pampered pet mouse (voiced by Hugh Jackman) who's flushed down a London toilet and teams up with other sewer creatures to fight an evil toad (Ian McKellen) and his goons. The film, directed by David Bowers and Sam Fell in the style of Nick Park's brilliant clay-animation romps, has all the English whimsy and sweetness of the Wallace and Gromit films, along with a very American need for speed. Though the characters mix it up in spectacular, Technicolor ways, the story, along with the usual cartoon lessons on community and responsibility, turns out to have a very cheeky class-warfare bite. With its singing slugs and refuse that looks like shards from an old Hollywood M-G-M set, this subterranean adventure is surprisingly captivating.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION
Christopher Guest, with the help of his co-writer, Eugene Levy, and his usual superb ensemble cast,



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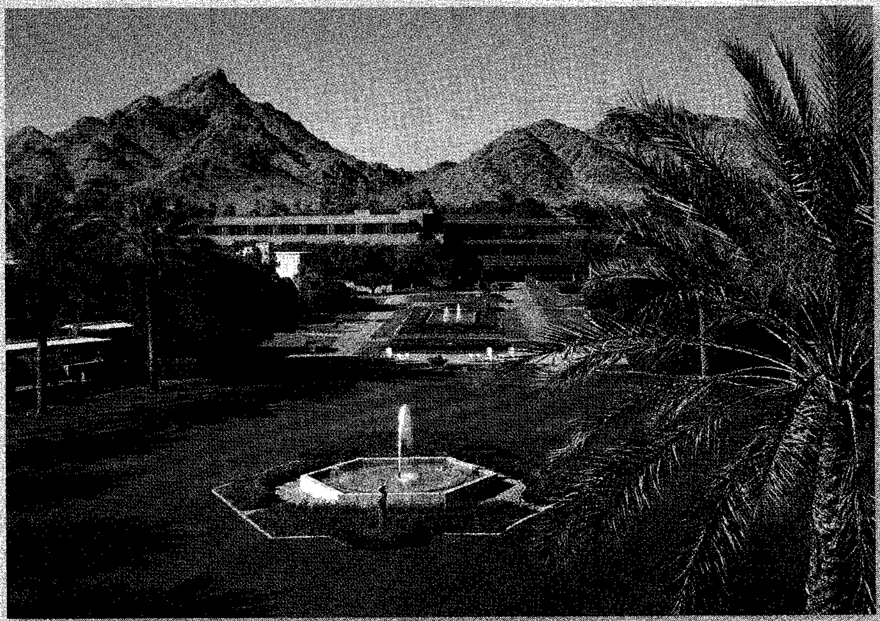

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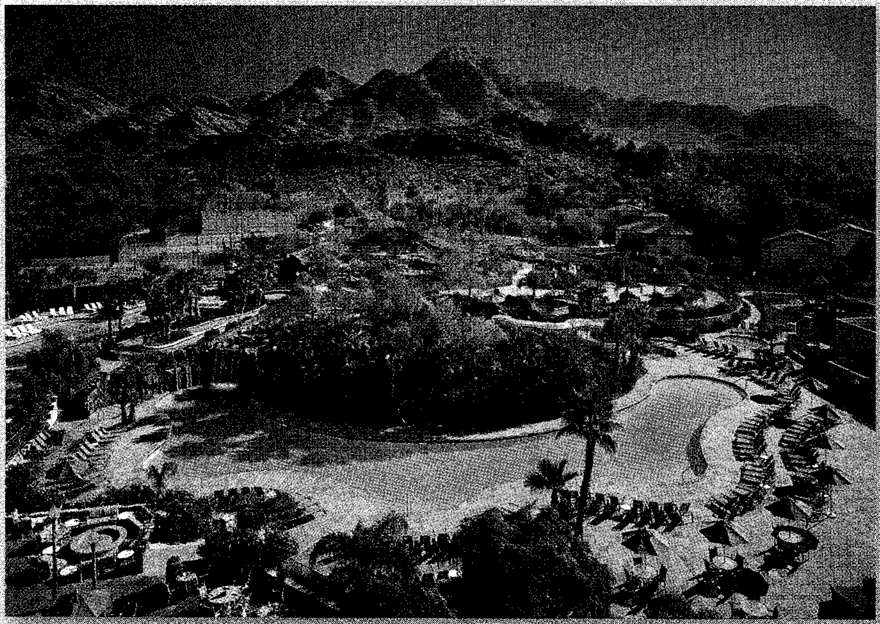

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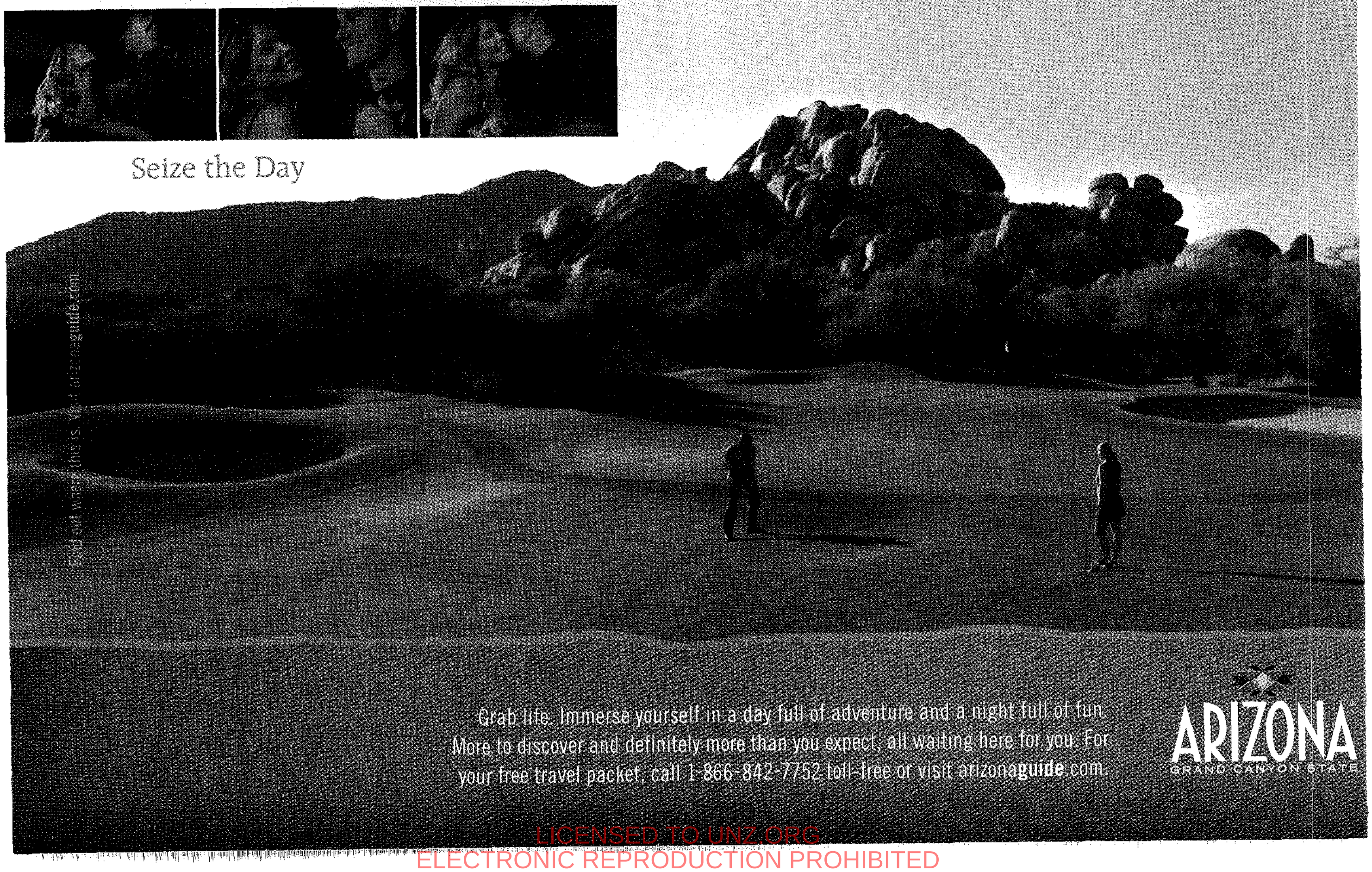

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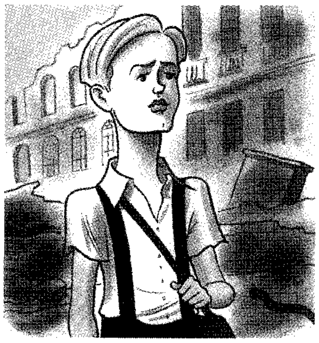
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
AGONY OF DEFEAT

In this country, some of Roberto Rossellini's major films are surprisingly hard to find—among them "Germany Year Zero," from 1948, the third in Rossellini's trilogy ("Rome Open City" and "Paisan" are the first two) devoted to the Second World War and the heartbreaking dislocations of its aftermath. Shot mostly in Berlin in 1947, the movie demonstrates convincingly that being victimized by war doesn't make anyone a better person. A number of families, squeezed together into a single flat, grab at limited rations, kilowatts, and working plumbing. A twelve-year-old boy, Edmund (Edmund Moeschke), hoping to trade his family's few possessions for food, wanders the streets and gets cheated and robbed in every encounter. The theme is the abuse of innocence, but the movie's eloquence goes beyond indignation: the colossal rubble of Berlin is not just an analogue to the collapse of the social order but an amazing sight, and the movie makes you feel the weight of every smashed façade and fallen stone. Showing at MOMA on Nov. 24 in its comprehensive Rossellini retrospective.

—*David Denby*



MAURICE VELLEKOOP

skewers the movie business in this satire of an independent film that suddenly garners unexpected Oscar buzz. The action centers around the movie-within-the-movie, "Home for Purim," directed by the frizzy-haired Jay Berman (Guest) and starring the faded actress Marilyn Hack (Catherine O'Hara), the hot-dog-commercial mascot Victor Allan Miller (Harry Shearer), and the ingénue Callie Webb (Parker Posey). Guest takes his time exhibiting the drivel that passes for conversation in the down moments of filmmaking and the cruelty of the bloodsucking side industries—agents, P.R. people, gossip TV shows. While there are some very funny moments—Jennifer Coolidge is particularly brilliant as the vapid diaper-heir producer—O'Hara, Posey, and Shearer bring a realistic poignancy to their roles as D-list actors who nervously dare to hope. And, in the end, Guest delivers a trenchant indictment of the industry that drives it all.—*Shauna Lyon* (In wide release.)

FUR

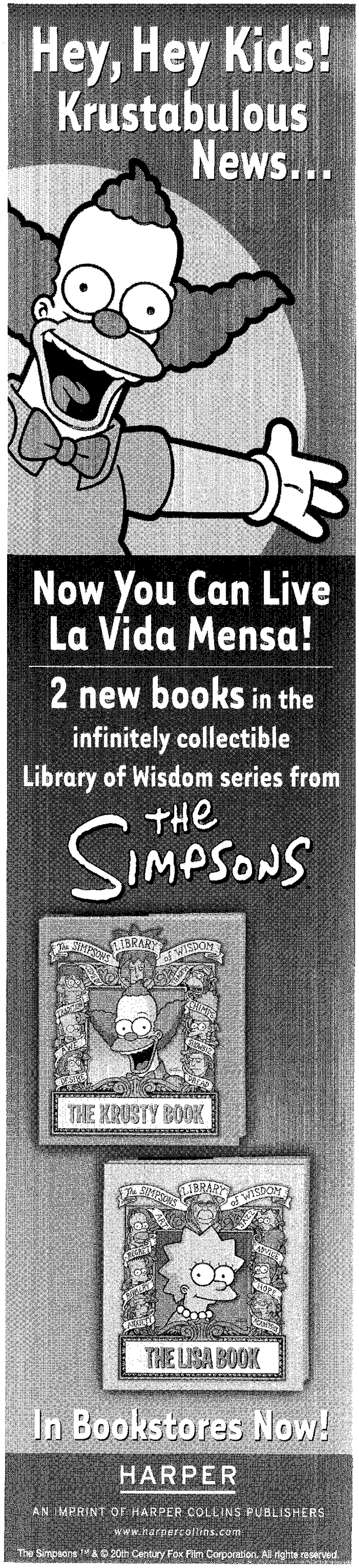
An excruciatingly misguided fantasia about the young Diane Arbus (Nicole Kidman), a highly competent but anxious fifties wife who wanders upstairs in her New York house and enters the world of a man suffering from hypertrichosis—excessive hairiness. His name is Lionel, and he's a quietly dominating gent who murmurs to Diane in confiding tones and orders her around. Step by step, Arbus's life with her husband and children gives way to her life with Lionel, who introduces her to a netherworld of outcasts and freaks. The movie is meant to be an erotically charged version of "Beauty and the Beast," but it comes off as Mrs. Miniver Meets Chewbacca. In what is supposed to be a terribly touching scene, Diane shaves off all of Lionel's body hair, which requires quite a bit of lather. Her expert barbering reveals the handsome torso and doleful countenance of Robert Downey, Jr., the wolfman reborn as a lover. Written by Erin Cressida Wilson and directed by Steven Shainberg.—*D.D.* (11/13/06) (In wide release.)

A GOOD YEAR

It's always a good year for Peter Mayle, the author who has, by our count, concocted twelve books out of the pleasures of living in Provence. In this movie, based on a Mayle novel, Russell Crowe is Max Skinner, an unscrupulous bond trader living in a dark and dreary London where it's always raining, or about to rain, or has just finished raining—even indoors, it seems, since the decorator colors in the interiors are sleet gray. Max inherits the charming Provençal property Château La Siroque from the uncle (Albert Finney) with whom he used to spend his summers. You can figure out the rest. There are wily Provençal types, a beautiful woman (Marion Cotillard) who rides a bicycle with her hair flying in the breeze, great meals, and much confusing intrigue about a peculiar corner of the château's vineyards. The director, Ridley Scott, has trouble finding a suitable tempo and style. The movie is wildly overshot and overcut; the simplest scenes jump around from one angle to another. The filmmakers may love Provence, but they don't trust the audience to love it—even as a travelogue, the movie is a cheat.—*D.D.* (11/13/06) (In wide release.)

HARSH TIMES

In David Ayer's intense, volatile drama, Christian Bale is flamboyantly virtuosic as Jim Davis, a recently discharged soldier who is home again in L.A. after a long and rough tour of duty in Afghanistan, which left him hyped on (and haunted by) the high-tech killing. But Davis is also the tenderhearted fiancé of a young Mexican woman whom he visits across the border. The two sides of the character's personality don't really mesh, but unity of character is hardly Ayer's point. Watching Jim spiral downward through the underworld of drug dealers while dragging his friend Mike (Freddy Rodríguez) into more trouble than he bargained for is like being kicked in the head for two hours, though in the most positive sense. Ayer builds the film around shocking and realistic violence, which he never romanticizes. In dramatizing the human price of warfare—and of the drug wars at home and its hypocrisies—Ayer takes a street-smart view of class-based anxieties: his characters are one break away from a toehold on respectability, from



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jail, or from death. Eva Longoria co-stars as Mike's long-suffering wife; Tammy Trull is touching as Marta, Jim's fiancée.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

THE HISTORY BOYS

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

LITTLE CHILDREN

A disappointed young mother (Kate Winslet) who has given up graduate school for a lousy marriage in the suburbs starts an affair with a former golden-boy college jock (Patrick Wilson), who is also married but stranded in adulthood. There's an element of garden-variety suspense in Todd Field's new movie, which he adapted with Tom Perrotta from Perrotta's novel—will the lovers run away together? But the movie is about a lot more. In a community devoted to the protection of children, a convicted sex offender (Jackie Earle Haley) shows up. The consternation he creates is so extreme that it seems the filmmakers might be suggesting a metaphor for the indeterminate but all-encompassing threat of terrorism; at the least, they are suggesting that both men and women are transferring their sexual frustrations and fears onto a pervert. The filmmakers' tone veers between a slightly mischievous irony and the most generous sympathy. The sex scenes are brief, naked, heated, startling. In all, it's a beautifully crafted piece of work that leaves you saddened by the mistakes that decent people make but also hopeful about the possibilities of renewal. With Noah Emmerich as a hysterical ex-cop and Jennifer Connelly as a loving wife more interested in her baby son than in her handsome but hapless husband.—*D.D.* (10/16/06) (In wide release.)

MARIE ANTOINETTE

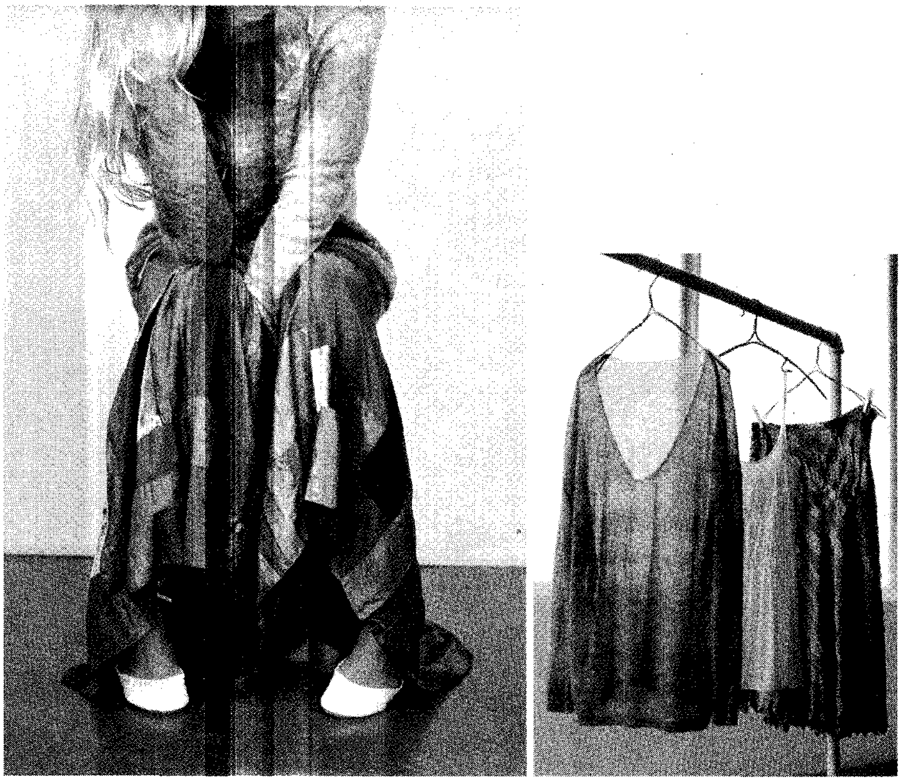
If you want your movies to feel like watered silk—lustrous, precious, and thinner than skin—then Sofia Coppola's latest venture is for you. Kirsten Dunst, who even at her ditziest gives off a whiff of the narcoleptic, stars as Marie Antoinette, betrothed as an Austrian teen-ager to the clueless Dauphin of France (Jason Schwartzman). The sexual allure of her husband is on a par with the pink blancmanges on the dinner table, which is bad news for the royal succession but good for Coppola, who is left free to concentrate on desserts, hair styles, footwear, and other essentials of life. The result is less a character study than a pre-Revolutionary style catalogue, unembarrassed in its rage for the superficial. Somewhere beneath the frippery, there is a whisper of political threat: if the Queen really *was* as prodigal and heedless as this, no wonder the mobs were on the march. Toward the end, Coppola does indeed show Versailles under siege, but the onslaught is far too paltry, and too late, to hold any terrors. The cast is a mixed salad: Rip Torn as the randy old King, Asia Argento as his mistress, Judy Davis as a court harpy, and Marianne Faithfull, no less, as the mother of Marie Antoinette.—*A.L.* (10/23/06) (In wide release.)

NIGHTJOHN

Despite awkward, prosy patches, this adaptation of Gary Paulsen's novel, by the gifted director Charles Burnett and the screenwriter Bill Cain, is a surprisingly full account of slave life in the eighteen-fifties as well as a potent fable of literacy. Carl Lumbly brings bedrock conviction to the role of Nightjohn, a Johnny Appleseed of education who returns to slavery from a free life up North and risks mutilation for teaching slaves to read and write. With a strong core of actors, including the pleasingly unactressy Allison Jones as Sarny, the twelve-year-old girl who is Nightjohn's disciple, and Lorraine Toussaint as her surrogate mother, Burnett is able to throw the supporting cast some brilliant bits. For one whole astonishing minute, Bill Cobbs, as a slave called Old Man, bitterly spits out the alphabet, conveying hidden danger and tragedy in every letter. The scenes between the driven plantation owner (Beau Bridges) and his restive son have an eloquent tension. Released in 1996.—*Michael Sragow* (Anthology Film Archives; Nov. 21.)

ON THE WATERFRONT

This is one of the most powerful American movies of the fifties, and few movies caused so much talk, excitement, and dissension—largely because of Marlon Brando's performance as the inarticulate, instinctively alienated bum, Terry Malloy.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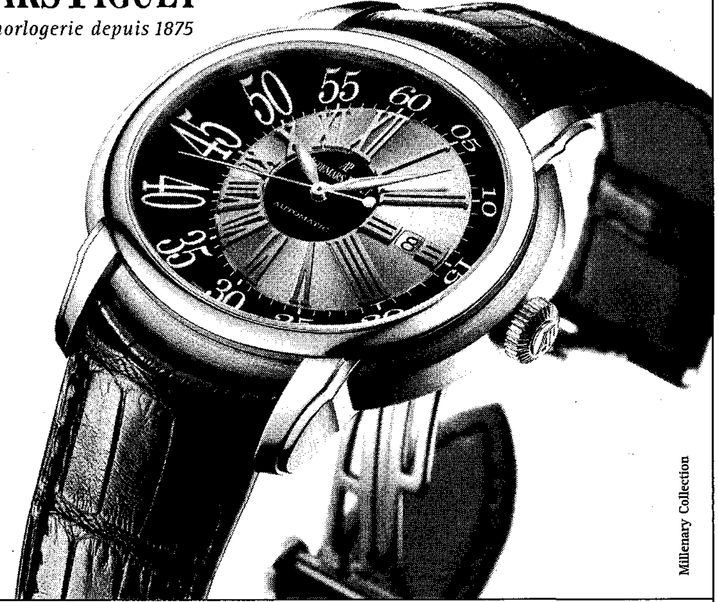

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Some of Brando's scenes, such as his having a beer with Eva Marie Saint in a bar and his conversation with Rod Steiger in a car, have real vibration. (The latter one has been imitated to the point of notoriety.) The attempt at dynamic Christian symbolism and Karl Malden's big scenes as a conscientious priest are far below the imaginative level of the simpler, more realistic scenes, and the director, Elia Kazan, hypes up the hollowest parts of the melodrama, achieving some effects of shrieking emptiness. It's a near-great film, though.—*Pauline Kael* (Walter Reade Theatre; Nov. 24.)

OUR DAILY BREAD

Beef, grapes, pork, fish, nuts, milk, eggs: these and other foodstuffs are plentiful and cheap in Europe and North America as a result of modern industrial methods, which, however, are as disturbing to observe as surgery. The Austrian filmmaker-cinematographer Nikolaus Geyrhalter has filmed them unflinchingly, and his controlled, elegant images of high-tech slaughterhouses, greenhouses, and factories, taken together, are a feature-length ironically arched eyebrow at the denaturing of our dietary staples. As appalling as the organized, mechanized, and sanitized mass slaughters and harvests seem, the food arrives reliably. Geyrhalter's aestheticized approach, shunning voice-overs and interviews and showing only his on-site documentary footage, leaves a viewer longing for talking heads to offer explanation, critique, and perspective.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives.)

THE QUEEN

The new Stephen Frears film considers the deadlock, both grieving and comical, that followed the death of the Princess of Wales, in 1997. On the one hand, the Queen (Helen Mirren), believing it to be a private matter, stays and broods in Scotland with the Duke of Edinburgh (James Cromwell) and Prince Charles (Alex Jennings). On the other hand, Tony Blair (Michael Sheen), sensing a thirst for public mourning and thus a unique political opportunity, urges Her Majesty to return to London and face down the mob. And so she does; the crux of the drama comes when Mirren turns to the crowd outside Buckingham Palace and, with one smile, quashes any prospect of rebellion. The script, by Peter Morgan, relies largely on well-grounded speculation, and sticklers for accuracy will find the whole thing straying beyond belief; but, thanks to the careful performances, you subscribe all too readily to the movie's suggestion of a divided land—of a Britain caught between the trustworthy stiffness of tradition and a liberalism that is open not just to emotional honesty but to the coarseness of modern excess. With Helen McCrory as a distinctly unceremonious Cherie Blair.—*A.L.* (10/9/06) (In wide release.)

SHUT UP & SING

The great documentary filmmaker Barbara Kopple (here working with a co-director, Cecilia Peck) delivers, as usual, an impeccably managed, hands-off approach to a great subject. For three years, Kopple and Peck followed the country-pop sensation the Dixie Chicks around America, tracking the fallout from remarks made in 2003 by the lead singer, Natalie Maines, who said that the group was "ashamed the President of the United States is from Texas." The quote, days before the American invasion of Iraq, sent country-radio programmers and listeners into a frenzy. The film concentrates on the effect that these protests had on the group, as well as the gradual upturn of their career as Bush's popularity waned. The movie culminates with a few tunes from their new album, "Taking the Long Way," that illustrate the strength and passion required to remain defiant.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

UP/DOWN/FRAGILE

Jacques Rivette's fluffy yet melancholy musical, from 1995, about three waif-like young women adrift in a Paris summer, floats on a web of coincidence stretched between paranoia and magic. Ninon (Nathalie Richard), a compulsive thief who loves to dance, is a motor-scooting and roller-blading messenger on the run from the police. Louise (Marianne Denicourt) awakens from a five-year coma and learns that she has inherited a town house, but she suffers from vertigo and thinks that she's being followed. Ida (Laurence Côte) works as an art librarian and lives in iso-

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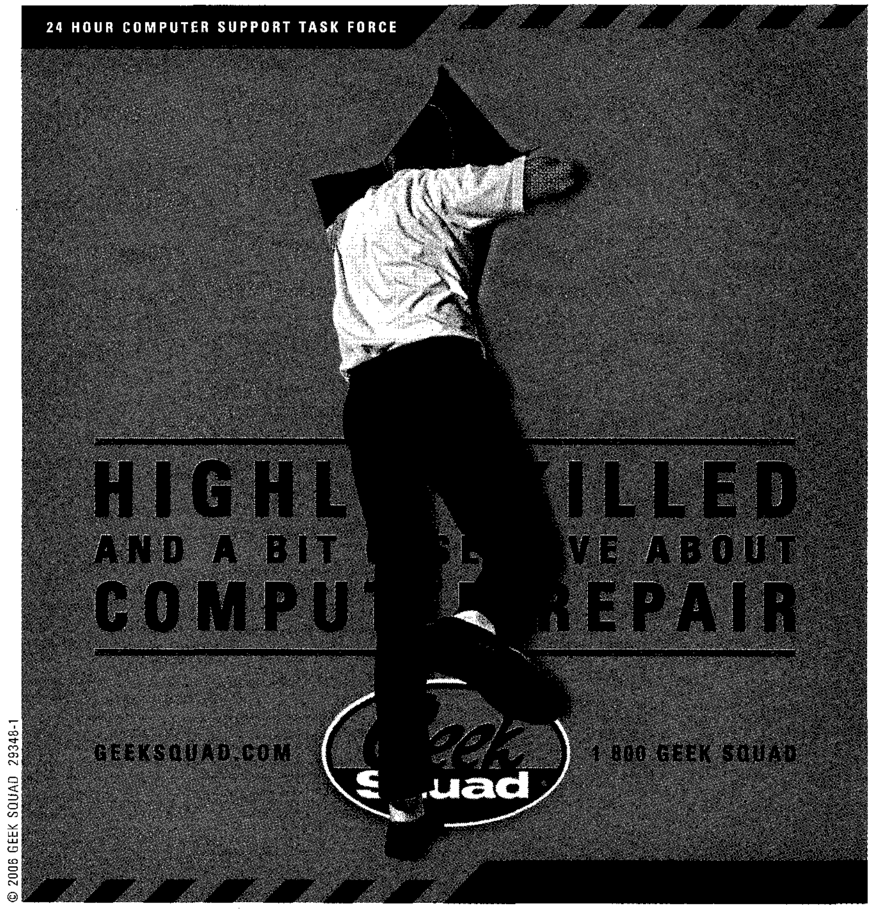

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lation, haunted by the fact that she has never met her birth mother. Their indeterminate destinies are connected by Roland (André Marcon), a set designer whose enchanted, hangar-like studio faces the messenger service and who purchased several antiques from Louise's aunt. Characters break out into song at crucial moments and dance away the evenings in a night club—yet a secret society run by the club manager threatens to turn their serious fun into frivolous danger. The acting veers between mischievously amateurish awkwardness and a rigorous theatrical precision, and Rivette's sly direction alternates to match; but the film catches romantic fire when the club owner, Sarah (a gloriously mature Anna Karina), takes the stage to sing. In French.—*R.B.* (Moving Image; Nov. 24-25.)

VOLVER

The new film from Pedro Almodóvar stars Penélope Cruz as Raimunda, who is soon seen mopping up the blood of her murdered husband—slain by her daughter, whom he tried to abuse—and stashing him in a freezer. This being Almodóvar, such horrors have a jaunty edge, and the colors (red gore against blue floor) are picked out with an unembarrassed eye. The story is more or less a male-free zone, and any other director would be chastised for training his camera so devotedly on a succession of cleavages. We follow Raimunda's timid sister (Lola Dueñas) as she mourns her aunt (Chus Lampreave) and then takes up, quite happily, with the ghost of her dead mother (Carmen Maura). Misfortune has befallen every generation, yet the victims are more resigned than surprised, as if, like the cheery local hooker (María Isabel Díaz), they know all men are traitors to begin with. Hitchcockians will warm to the credit sequence, which could be by Saul Bass, and to the score, which shimmers with echoes of Bernard Herrmann; even Hitchcock, however, might have balked at the level of emotional control that Almodóvar exerts upon his characters. You feel yourself gripped by a beautiful machine, engineered for the finest melodrama. In Spanish.—*A.L.* (11/6/06) (In wide release.)

VOYAGE IN ITALY

One of the most quietly revolutionary works in the history of cinema, Roberto Rossellini's third feature starring Ingrid Bergman (his wife at the time), from 1953, raises romantic melodrama to an intellectual adventure. An English couple—Alex Joyce (George Sanders), a cynical, supercilious businessman, and his sensitive, cultured wife, Katherine (Bergman)—drive to Naples to arrange the sale of a house bequeathed to them by Alex's expatriate uncle. Travelling alone together for the first time in eight years of childless marriage, they seem, as Katherine says, like strangers to each other, and the film tells the story of their deepening estrangement. Rossellini filmed on location and devoted as much attention to the Italian settings and their cultural treasures as to the characters wandering among them. Katherine's misery at her solitude becomes overwhelming at Pompeii as she witnesses the excavation of plaster casts of the entwined bodies of lovers blasted by Vesuvius. Rossellini's ambitious political agenda—regarding the postwar dominance of a new managerial class and its discontents—only heightens the drama: the elegant couple's separation is wrenching, and their last chance at reconciliation is profoundly moving. Here, the young French New Wave critics learned to fuse Hollywood styles with European philosophy, to make high-gloss movies on low budgets.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Nov. 24.)

Also Playing

COME EARLY MORNING: In wide release. **COPYING BEETHOVEN:** Paris and Sunshine Cinema. **LET'S GO TO JAIL:** In wide release. **THE RETURN:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"NewFilmmakers Presents." Nov. 22 at 7:10:

"Industrial TV" (2006, Edmund Varuolo). ♦ Nov. 22 at 8:15: "Scared on Staten Island" (2006, Joe Rice and Chris Mancuso). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Nov. 22 at 4:30: "Arabic Series 11-19" (1981, Stan Brakhage). ♦ Through Dec. 6: African Diaspora Film Festival. Selected screenings. Nov. 24 at 8:30 and Nov. 25 at 8: "Homecoming" (2005, Norman Maake). ♦ Nov. 27 at noon: "Nightjohn" (†). ♦ Nov. 28 at 1:30: "The Glass Ceiling" (2004, Yamina Benguigui; in French). (For complete program information, go to www.nyadff.org.)

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Give Thanks for John Ford." Nov. 22 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:40 and Nov. 23-24 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Searchers" (1956). The 6:50 screening on Nov. 22 will be introduced by Jonathan Lethem. ♦ Nov. 25 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Two Rode Together" (1961). ♦ Nov. 26 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" (1962). ♦ Martial-arts films. Nov. 27 at 6:50 and 9:15: "The Five Venoms" (1978, Chang Cheh; in Cantonese and Mandarin). ♦ Nov. 28 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Dirty Ho" (1979, Liu Chia-Liang; in Cantonese).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Nov. 22-28 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Two or Three Things I Know About Her" (1966, Jean-Luc Godard; in French).

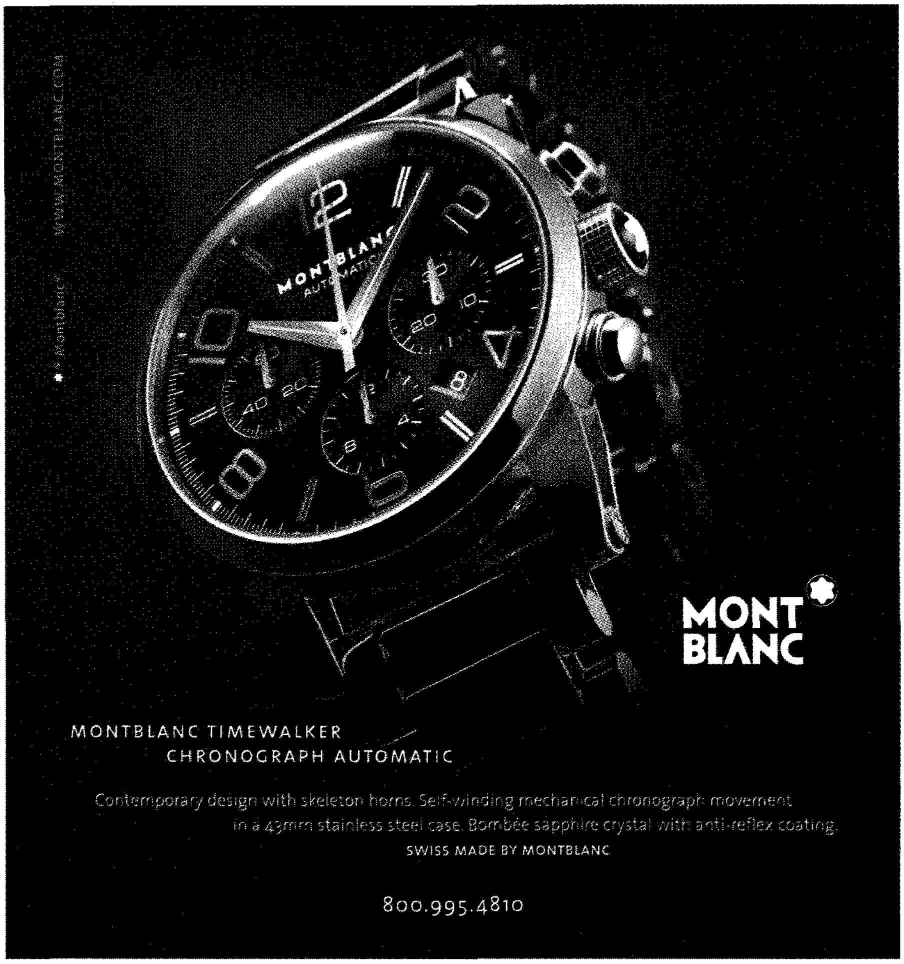
FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—The films of Jacques Audiard. Nov. 28 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "See How They Fall" (1994; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Essential Art House: 50 Years of Janus Films." Nov. 22-28: "Cleo from 5 to 7" (1961, Agnès Varda; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Nov. 24-25: "Mulholland Drive" (2001, David Lynch).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through Dec. 22: The films of Roberto Rossellini. Except where noted, all films are in Italian. Nov. 24 at 4:30: "Germany Year Zero" (1948; in German). ♦ Nov. 24 at 6: "Voyage in Italy" (†). ♦ Nov. 24 at 7:30: "Stromboli" (1949). ♦ Nov. 25 at 2: "Blaise Pascal" (1971). ♦ Nov. 25 at 4:30: "The Messiah" (1975). ♦ Nov. 25 at 7:30: "India" (1958; in Italian and various Indian dialects). ♦ Nov. 26 at 2 and Nov. 27 at 7:45: "Where Is Liberty?" (1954). ♦ Nov. 26 at 4: "The Flowers of St. Francis" (1950). ♦ Nov. 26 at 5:45: "The Machine That Kills Bad People" (1945-52). ♦ Nov. 27 at 6: "Desire" (1943-46, Rossellini and Marcello Pagliero). ♦ "Best Film Not Playing at a Theatre Near You," recent independent films. Nov. 24 at 6 and Nov. 26 at 2: "In Between Days" (2006, So Yong Kim). ♦ Nov. 24 at 8 and Nov. 26 at 4: "Colma: The Musical" (2006, Richard Wong). ♦ Nov. 25 at 2 and Nov. 26 at 6: "Choking Man" (2006, Steve Barron). ♦ Nov. 25 at 4 and Nov. 27 at 6: "Wristcutters—A Love Story" (2006, Goran Dukic). ♦ Nov. 25 at 6 and Nov. 27 at 8: "The Great Happiness Space: Tale of an Osaka Love Thief" (2006, Jake Clennell).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Dec. 31: The films of Jacques Rivette. All films are in French. Nov. 24 at 7:30 and Nov. 25 at 6:30: "Up/Down/Fragile" (†). ♦ Nov. 25 at 2 and Nov. 26 at 6:30: "La Belle Noiseuse" (1991). ♦ Nov. 26 at 2: "Joan the Maid" (1994).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. Nov. 22, Nov. 24, and Nov. 26-27 at 7:15: "Dance Party USA" (2006, Aaron Katz). ♦ Nov. 22 and Nov. 24-28 at 9: "Sun Kissed" (2006, Patrick McGuinn). ♦ In revival. Nov. 24 at 11: "Strangers with Candy" (2005, Paul Dinello). ♦ Nov. 25 at 11: "Easy Rider" (1969, Dennis Hopper).



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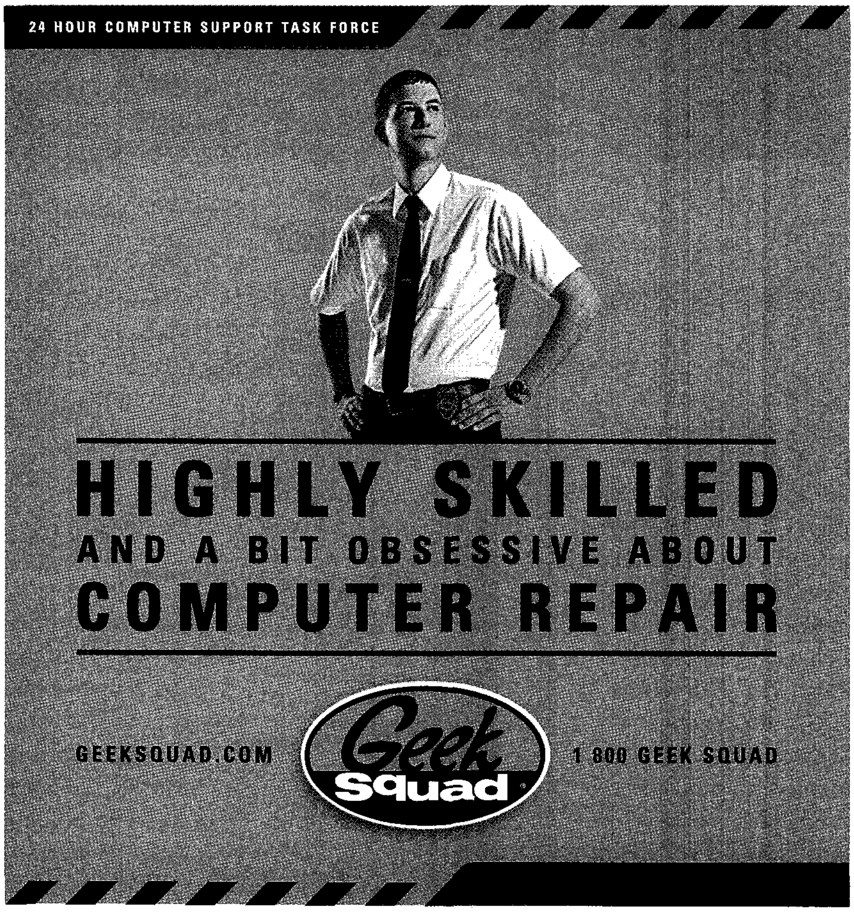

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RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Nov. 24 at 7: "Gentleman's Agreement" (1947, Elia Kazan), introduced by Kitty Carlisle Hart.

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@ Midnight." Nov. 22-25: "King Kong" (1933, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Thalia Film Classics." Nov. 26 and Nov. 28 at 4:30: "The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl" (1993, Ray Müller; in German).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Dziga and His Brothers." Nov. 22 at 1 and 8 and Nov. 26 at 3:15: "L'Atalante" (1934, Jean Vigo; in French). ♦ Nov. 22 at 3 and 6:15: "Zero for Conduct" (1933, Jean Vigo; in French) and "À Propos de Nice" (1930, Vigo; silent). ♦ Nov. 22 at 4:30 and Nov. 25 at 5:30: "Dziga and His Brothers" (2002, Yevgeni Tsymbal; in Russian). ♦ Nov. 24 at 1 and Nov. 26 at 5:15: "Three Songs About Lenin" (1934, Dziga Vertov; in Russian). ♦ Nov. 24 at 2:45, Nov. 25 at 1, and Nov. 26 at 9: "12 Angry Men" (1957, Sidney Lumet). ♦ Nov. 24 at 4:45: "Enthusiasm" (1931, Vertov). ♦ Nov. 24 at 6:30 and Nov. 25 at 3: "Splendor in the Grass" 1961, Elia Kazan). ♦ Nov. 24 at 9: "On the Waterfront" (†). ♦ Nov. 25 at 7:15: "Man with the Movie Camera" (Vertov, 1929; silent). ♦ Nov. 25 at 9: "Bye Bye Braverman" (1968, Lumet). ♦ Nov. 26 at 1: "The Pawnbroker" (1964, Lumet). ♦ Nov. 26 at 7:15: "In Spring" (1929, Mikhail Kaufman; silent). ♦ "Next Generation of Film." Nov. 27 at 8:30: Martin Scorsese discusses films by George Seaton and William Perlberg.

READINGS AND TALKS

SEAN LANDERS
The artist, who is known for his parodic text-adorned paintings, talks about his work. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 212-980-3942. Nov. 21 at 6:30.)

"THE RAP CANTERBURY TALES"
Baba Brinkman, a Canadian with a master's in medieval and Renaissance English literature from the University of Victoria, has created a hip-hop act from Chaucer's classic. He's also published the piece in a book called "The Rap Canterbury Tales." This week he performs his act twice. On Nov. 21 at 8, he's at Adam's Books (456 Bergen St., Brooklyn; 718-789-1534), and, on Nov. 22 at 8, he's at the Kraine Theatre (85 E. 4th St. 212-777-6088).

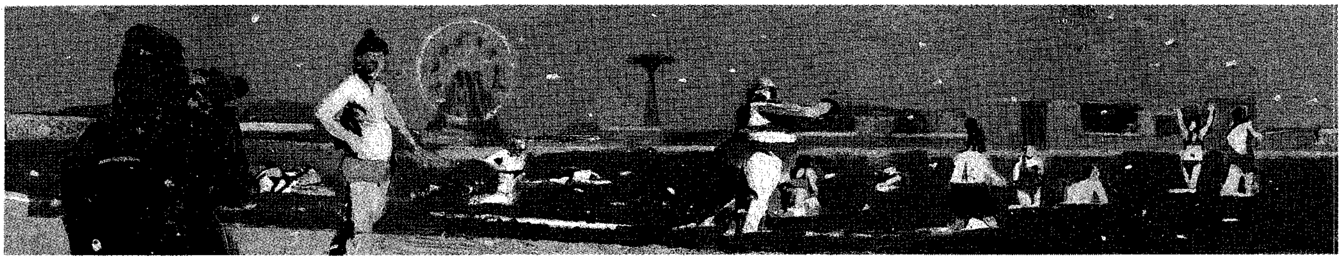
92ND STREET Y
The novelist Rick Moody interviews Stephin Merritt, the leader of the eclectic indie-pop band Magnetic Fields. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Nov. 27 at 8.)

FRANK O'HARA FESTIVAL
A three-day celebration of the late New York poet's life and work gets under way on Nov. 28 at 7 with a discussion by the poet, critic, and onetime O'Hara collaborator Bill Berkson. (Poets House, 72 Spring St., 2nd fl. Tickets at the door.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

WALK OFF THE TURKEY
Shorewalkers, a nonprofit advocacy group dedicated to step-by-step explorations of the city's littoral zone, presents the opportunity to undo some of the caloric damage that Thanksgiving can inflict, with a hike of eleven miles or so along the Hudson, from South Ferry to the Little Red Lighthouse, beneath the George Washington Bridge. (Nov. 25, starting at 9 A.M. For more information, visit www.shorewalkers.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
After a whirl of contemporary and single-owner sales last week, the breakneck pace continues at **Sotheby's** with two days of auctions of Latin-American art (Nov. 20-21), dominated by the prolific Colombian artist Fernando Botero. "Jugadoras de Cartas II," from 1989, offers a juicy scene in which characteristically plump ladies partake in a deceitful card game in the nude alongside their fully dressed gentlemen callers. These sales are also strong in sculptures, with works by Francisco Zúñiga and the Cuban modernist Agustín Cárdenas as well as Botero. After a Thanksgiving break, activities resume with an auction of nineteenth-century furniture (Nov. 28-29). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ The evening sale of Latin-American art at **Christie's** (Nov. 21) features the large-scale Botero painting "Los Amantes," in which a luscious monumental nude eclipses her miniature lover, as well as several historically relevant nineteenth-century works, such as "El Parián," a *casta* painting set in a marketplace, which depicts the different "types" that made up colonial Mexican society: Spaniards, *indios*, and blacks. The house is also offering a pair of pistols that once belonged to the Argentine independence hero General Manuel Belgrano. (A second, morning session follows on Nov. 22.) The afternoon of Nov. 21 is devoted to a sale of pre-Columbian art, including a large private collection of pottery, jades, and Mayan figurines. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)



ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
LOST IN THE HAYS
Dec. 1-21

Film Forum presents a series of movies made by Fox and 20th Century before the passage of the Hays Code, in 1934, which created stricter moral and sexual standards for Hollywood. The films include "The Bowery," Raoul Walsh's memoir of the New York streets; "Advice to the Lovelorn," adapted from Nathanael West's "Miss Lonelyhearts"; and "Now I'll Tell," with Spencer Tracy as a Jewish gangster. (212-727-8110.)

ART
READING HISTORY
Dec. 13-Feb. 24

Part two of the China Institute's "Shu: Reinventing Books in Contemporary Chinese Art" opens in December. For this portion of the show, the curator, Wu Hung, selected works that address the role of the book in Chinese history and memory. (212-744-8181.)

DANCE
MEN IN TIGHTS
Dec. 19-Jan. 7

The delightful all-male ballet troupe Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo brings some holiday cheer to the Joyce. Performances will include "Swan Lake," "Esmeralda," and the New York première of an adaptation of Jerome Robbins's "The Cage," complete with man-eating monsters. (www.joyce.org.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
RETURN OF THE KING
Dec. 21

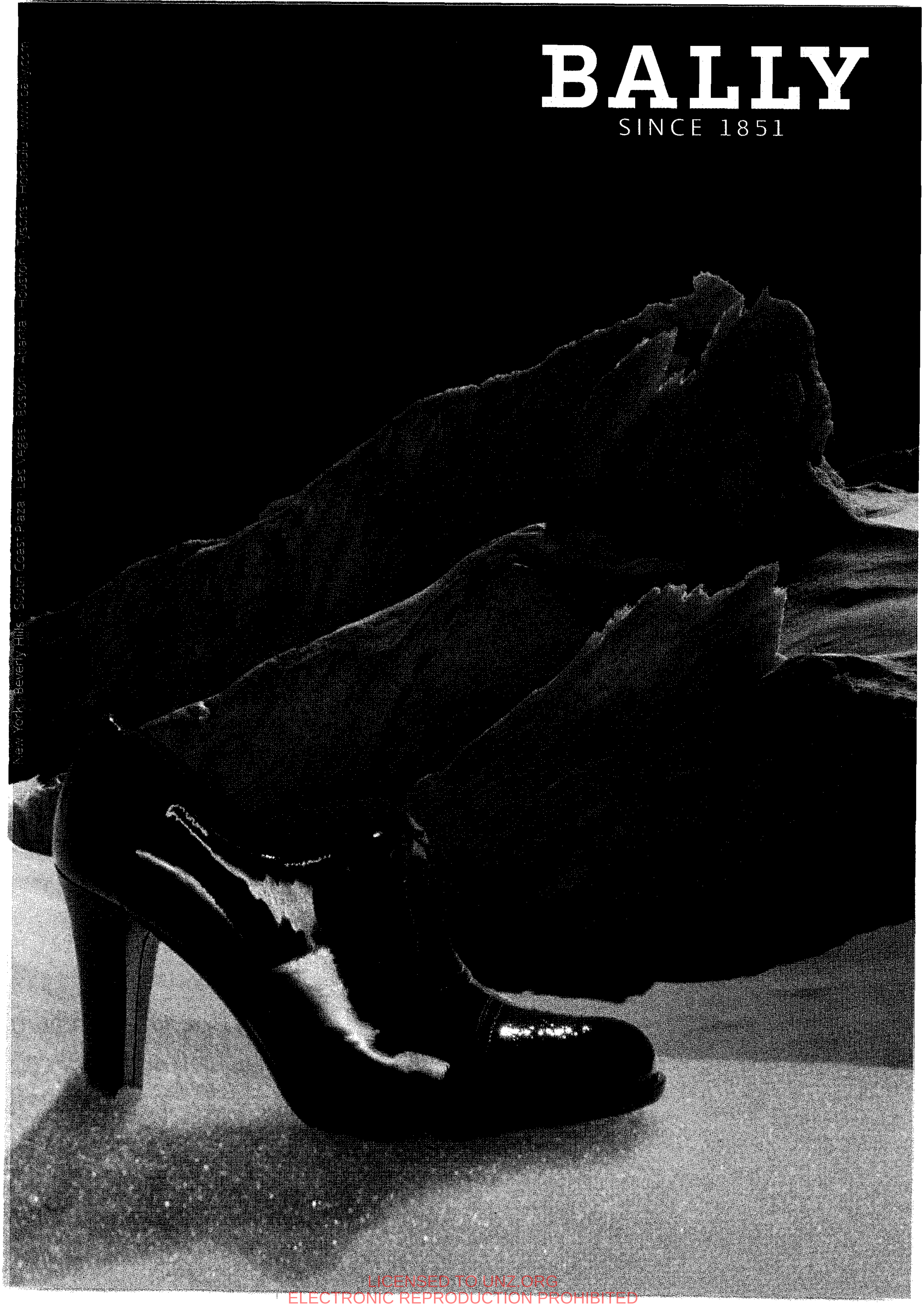
Plácido Domingo, an active if uneven champion of new operatic works, has turned to Tan Dun, one of the genre's great showmen, for "The First Emperor," a Metropolitan Opera commission about the ancient court of Qin Shi Huangdi in which Domingo will sing the title role. Zhang Yimou directs. (212-362-6000.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
EVERYBODY IN
Jan. 1

The Coney Island Polar Bear Club, whose motto is "Every day is a beach day," takes its New Year's Day dip in the icy North Atlantic. This year's event benefits Camp Sunshine, a nonprofit retreat in Maine for children with life-threatening illnesses and their families. (www.polarbearclub.org.)

The Coney Island Polar Bear Club, swimming on January 1.

ANDREA VENTURA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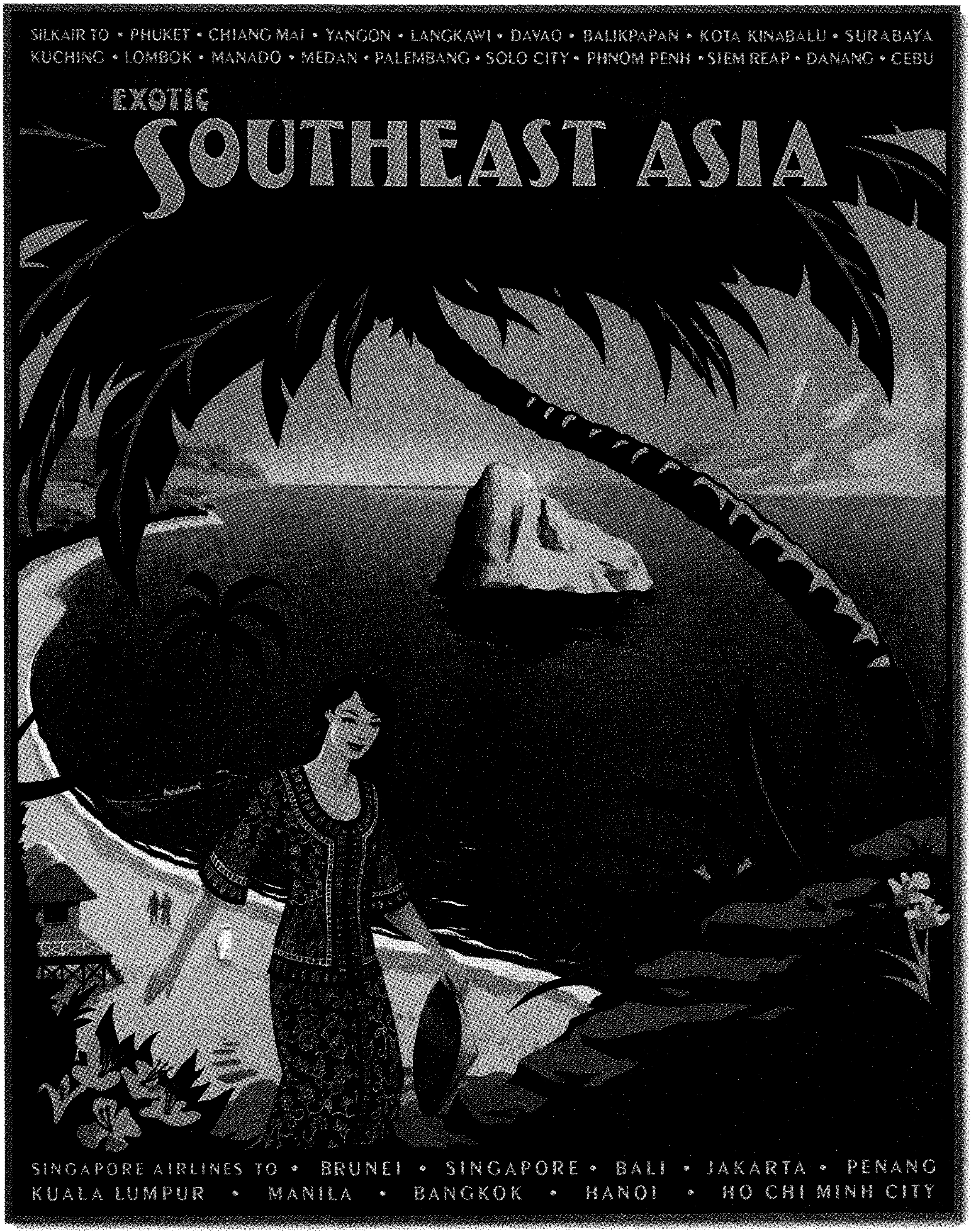
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TABLES FOR TWO
JEAN GEORGES

1 Central Park W. (212-299-3900)—Anyone looking to naysay the impeccable reputation of Jean Georges Vongerichten's flagship restaurant will have to work very hard. Even before the meal comes, the place is just about perfect, from the seamless coat check to the monochromatically chic crowd. The atmosphere is so understated—leather, glass, vast windows looking out on windblown birch trees—that the room practically recedes from consciousness. Cynical types looking for potential chinks in the perfection may find themselves playing stump the server: "What's *yuzu*?" (A Japanese citrus fruit.) "Is 'egg caviar' a redundant term?" (Not when it refers to a dish that involves an empty eggshell filled with scrambled egg and topped with sturgeon caviar and vodka crème.)

Unfortunately for the pessimists, and to the great benefit of everyone else, Jean Georges's waitstaff are pros. One recent evening, a woman rebuffed the bread basket; someone immediately replaced it with a silver dish of spiced cashews and almonds. But Atkins diets be damned: next came an appetizer of Kumamoto oyster and wild American caviar, crème fraîche, and toasted brioche. The effect was both decadent and fresh, as if the bivalves had taken a long soak in some sort of lemon bath. Young-garlic soup, with frogs' legs, seemed as though it would make you live forever, while slices of pear that came with the pan-roasted sweetbreads had the sort of lovingly laid-on grill marks that one might have assumed to be a figment of an adman's imagination. An amuse-bouche included gorgeously green dollops of arugula pureé, which floated on top of the plate like lily pads.

For dessert, one chooses a main ingredient—say, fig or chocolate—and out comes a quartered plate, laden with four variations on the theme: edible tic-tac-toe. Between a fig-and-chocolate tart, roasted figs with port, fig brioche with fig jam, and fig soufflé, it can be hard to make a move. Asked to recommend a strategy, a waitress hesitated, for the first time all evening. "We sort of suggest going clockwise," she said. Really, there's no wrong way to do it. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner and Saturdays for dinner. Prix fixe $95.)

—*Lauren Collins*

PETER LUGER STEAK HOUSE

178 Broadway, Brooklyn (718-387-7400)—Some steak-house buffs think that Peter Luger is overrated: they find the steak inconsistent, the side dishes wan, the prices lopsided, the service harsh. Others, at the mere mention of the place, clear their calendars and tuck napkins into their shirt collars; for them it's the ultimate indulgence, right up there with a weekend in Vegas. Both sides may be right, but Peter Luger should really be unrated. It's the gastronomic equivalent of cinematic sex and gore: "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" meets "Last Tango in Paris."

In the years since it was founded, in 1887, Peter Luger has not only made a few thousand top-ten lists but settled very deeply into its way of doing things. This way includes deriding anyone who is callow enough to ask for a menu and making wisecracks about the health benefits of the buttery juice that pools at one end of the restaurant's famous platter of carved porterhouse steak. (During the recent E. coli scare, a waiter joked, while presenting the creamed spinach, "Don't worry. It's frozen. It's from China.") Experts can quibble, but most beefeaters tend to find the porterhouse, which is dry-aged in-house, magnificent. The other righteous meat form is the bacon. For an appetizer, you get one thick, grizzled strip, a shiv to the heart. Peter Luger doesn't mess around with sissy seafood, like lobster or crab, but for color you get sliced tomatoes, with onions—an excuse to taste the steak sauce, which is best kept away from the steak.

In this ersatz version of gruff New York, the space (bright lights, rough-hewn wood tables and floors) and the staff (the bartenders have an especially petulant way of sweeping up a tip) conspire to make you feel blessedly unwelcome. You pay for the privilege—with cash or check (Peter Luger, of course, doesn't accept credit cards). The other day, at the end of a lunch for four, the waiter dropped off a check that read $811.67, inspiring panic and disbelief. After a moment, the waiter came back, with the real bill. The first had been a joke, although perhaps not quite enough of one. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Steak for one to four, $37.95-$155.80.)

—*Nick Paumgarten*

RUSSIAN SAMOVAR

256 W. 52nd St. (212-757-0168)—There are two main reasons that people go to the Russian Samovar: to drink house-infused vodkas in semiprecious hues (horseradish, coriander, cranberry, pear, and many more) and to see Roman Kaplan, a gregarious and worldly native of St. Petersburg, who opened the restaurant twenty years ago. (His friends Mikhail Baryshnikov and the late Joseph Brodsky both invested in it at some point.) Kaplan is one of those genial spirits who seem to know—or to want to get to know—everyone. On a recent night, he paused at a table for a quick hello, then excused himself: he had to attend to a pair of Russian aristocrats sitting in the corner booth.

There is a murky glamour to the Samovar. Tasselled lampshades, absinthe green and cherry red, cast an intimate glow over every table and booth. This light is kind to the food, which is a little strange—that is to say, authentic. A violent-magenta cabbage-and-beet slaw accompanies Georgian lamb chops, and the plate of homemade pickles includes a grayish heirloom tomato, steeped in pungent, spicy brine. The fresh blini are heaven (even if the salmon is too dense and pink) and come with a gravy boat of sour cream. The pastry—in the vol-au-vent, the piroshki, and the salmon coulibiac—is buttery and crisp, a perfect vehicle for the rich fillings. One of the most modest items, and one of the best, is the wild-mushroom soup. It is thick with porcini mushrooms and barley and served piping hot.

Among the celebrating Russians, clinking shot glasses and laughing darkly, there are always a few artists and writers, and the pianist, who bangs away at a white piano and belts out classic Russian tunes, finds it hard to keep his enthusiasm in check. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for lunch and dinner and Mondays for dinner. Entrées $15-$32.)

—*Dana Goodyear*

(Published in our issue of October 25, 2004.)

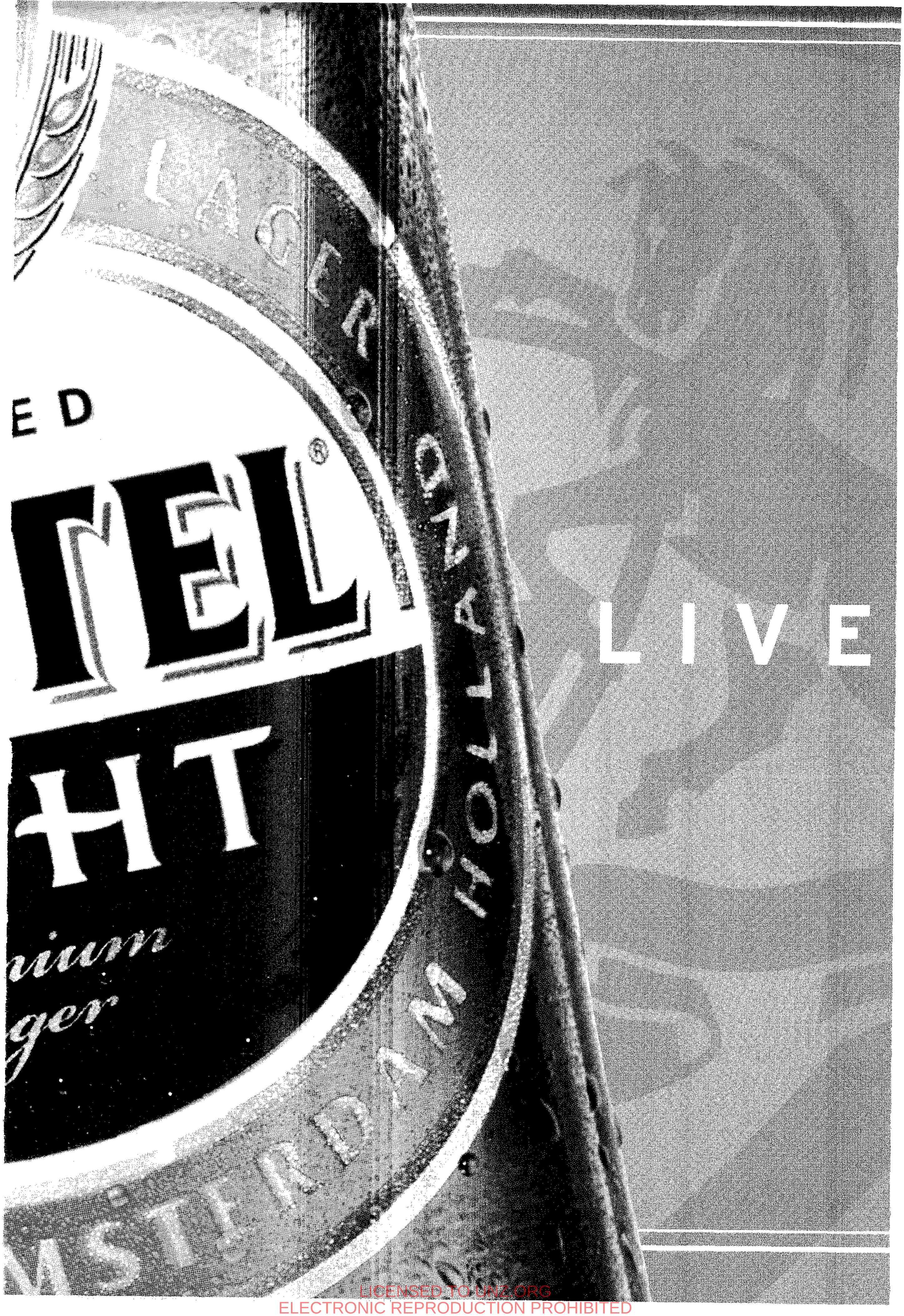
ELEVEN MADISON PARK

11 Madison Ave. (212-889-0905)—Originally a bank, Eleven Madison Park, in the MetLife building, is an Art Deco cathedral, grandly impressive but hardly intimate. Kerry Heffernan, who left the restaurant last year, responded by cooking with assertive flavors in an upscale version of French country fare. Now his successor, Daniel Humm, a Swiss-German chef, has gone to the other extreme, producing food that is intricate, even whimsical. Barely thirty years old and gleefully virtuosic, Humm is unafraid of seeming fancy.

Recently, an appetizer of foie-gras terrine arrived looking like dessert, the creamy layers of terrine separated by strips of sweet, tart jelly made with Bing cherries and port, and accompanied by a small pot of foie-gras crème brûlée. It's quite an achievement that this dish doesn't appear silly at all when you're eating it. Humm is the son of an architect, who hoped that he'd become one, too, and his salad of grilled watermelon and tomatoes suggests that, in a way, he has: vertical slabs in alternating shades of pink form an eccentric colonnade of which Frank Gehry could be proud.

Some of the main courses give rise to a suspicion that Humm's talents are best suited to petite portions. A beef tenderloin was supple but a little insipid, upstaged by its side dish of an earthy tartlet of braised oxtail, and a *loup de mer*, cooked with smashed zucchini,

ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILLIAM STEIG, 5/14/1960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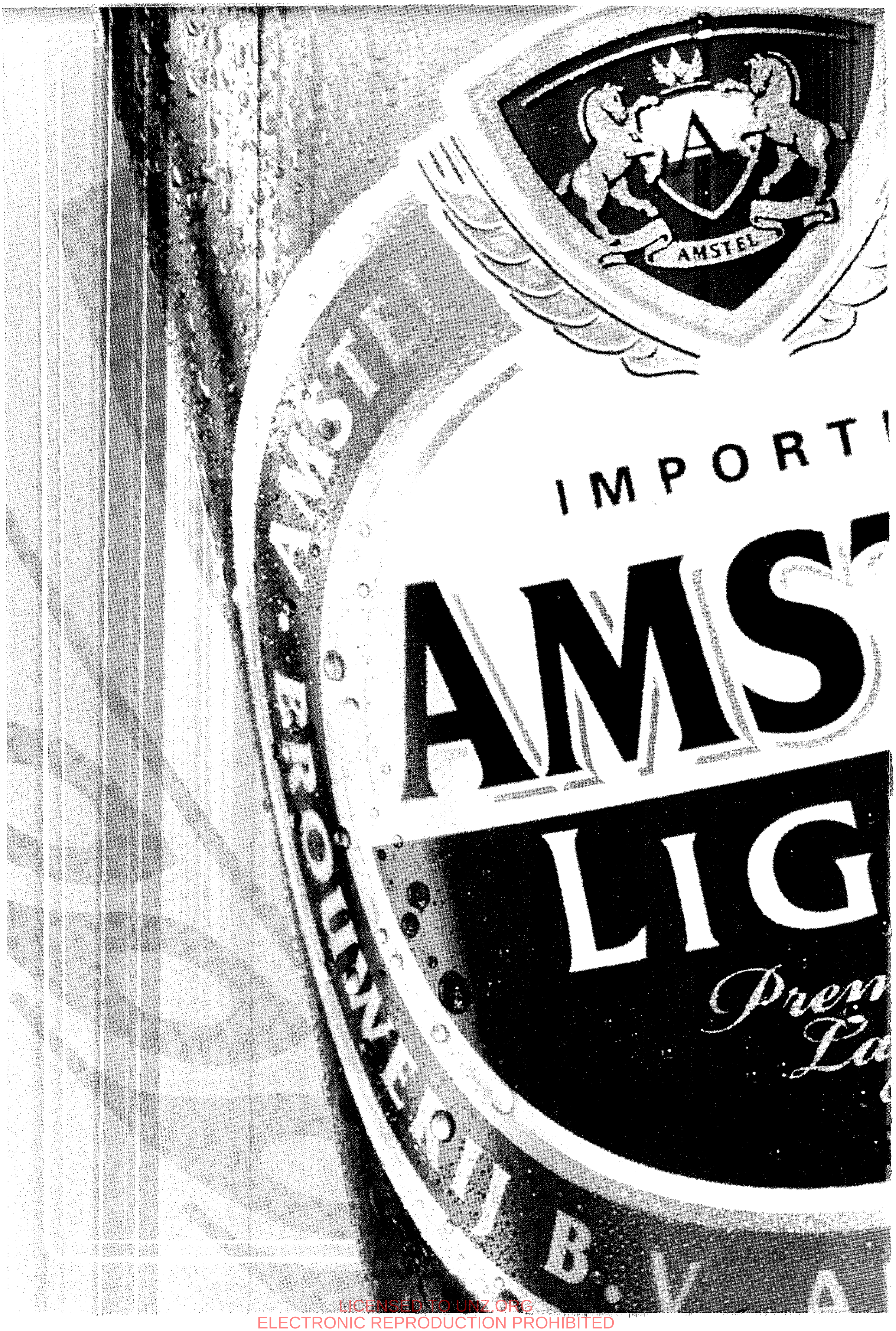
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tomatillo, and Meyer lemon, was too subtle for its own good. The best dishes on the menu, however, fuse Humm's sense of detail with heft, in a way that is arresting. Suckling pig usually conjures up a medieval vision of spits and trenchers; Humm's is a small rectangle that hardly looks adequate for a main course. But, having been cooked for ten hours in duck fat, the meat has a concentrated richness and a tenderness that seems entirely unlike pork. Glazed duck with honey and lavender, and miraculously crispy skin, comes with a postage-stamp-size confit of leg, which, by this point in the meal, is hard to find room for. Such dishes epitomize Humm's gift for doing small things mightily. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Dinner prix fixe $76.)

—Leo Carey

TELEPAN

72 W. 69th St. (212-580-4300)—Visiting this Upper West Side restaurant, just off Columbus Avenue and among the brownstones, feels like being entertained in the home of a wealthy, extremely solicitous host. It's not just the renovated town house that it occupies; it's also the well-spaced seating and eager-to-please staff, the warm, pea-green walls, and the unobtrusive yet oddball art. (One large painting shows a strapping young farmer, wearing a gimme cap, striking a pose before a silo.)

Although the chef, Bill Telepan, has long been a practitioner of seasonal cooking (his last restaurant, Judson Grill, closed in 2004), he wears his ideals lightly. The results are not uniformly excellent, but for every mediocre bit there's something lively and unique. A quail appetizer was too drab to merit the effort to strip the meat from the bone. The black-truffle pierogi, on the other hand, had a bold flavor and a creamy texture, and the outstanding yellowtail tabbouleh consisted of sweet slabs of raw fish over chewy grains laced with cured tuna and mint. The entrées tended to tread safer paths, with less satisfactory results. The salmon—the waitress added, "I tell people right up front that it's farmed, not wild, after that article about places that try to trick you"—was heavily breaded, and the chicken, while nicely roasted, was forgettable. Even here, though, there was compensation: the duck, served with foie-gras custard, was delicately indulgent. (At lunchtime, when the place loosens up a little, there's a fine burger, accompanied by housemade pickles and a "volcano" of softly battered onion rings and fries.)

And so it went with dessert. A smooth peanut-butter-and-milk-chocolate *gianduja* was classically satisfying, but it arrived with an incongruous heap of huckleberry gelée, which didn't quite pull off its presumed evocation of jelly. Still, the sensation of a coddled life persisted: as soon as one ventured from the table, a neatly suited server stepped up as a polite, perfectly discreet escort, and a parting gift of rich chocolate truffles arrived, already boxed up to go. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays for lunch and dinner and Mondays and Tuesdays for dinner. Entrées $15.50-$36.)

—Andrea Thompson
(March 20, 2006)

AUGUST

359 Bleecker St., between Charles and W. 10th Sts. (212-929-4774)—If certain restaurants could be prescribed as antidotes to impending winter blahs, August would be one. The place recalls the description of Badger's burrow in "The Wind in the Willows": homey, snug, and full of provisions. The main room has cracked plaster walls, pews for seats, jars of preserves here and there, and a domed cork ceiling that confers the feeling of being stowed inside a barrel. In the back, a glassed-in patio draws heat from the restaurant's wood-burning brick oven—it's a sort of improvised hothouse for undernourished city dwellers.

The chef, Tony Liu, is an alumnus of Babbo, and the food is pan-European stick-to-your-ribs, with lots of garlic, cheese, and root vegetables. Tarte flambé, an Alsatian-style house specialty, is topped with fromage blanc, garlic crème fraîche, onions, and bacon. It is lightly charred, with the same delectably sweet, smoky flavor that clings to everything that comes out of the brick oven. Irish stew—a mélange of tiny yellow carrots, barley, and lamb seasoned with mint—arrives in a cast-iron pot, and is just the thing for a pre-hibernation tuck-in.

August doesn't take reservations, and hungry West Villagers can often be seen overflowing onto the sidewalk. If the service winds up being a bit off kilter, it is also pleasantly unpretentious. The food and the surroundings inspire such intense feelings of well-being that one's mind wanders to other times when one felt this contented. "The first time I had Welsh rabbit was a café in Morcambe, on the Irish Sea coast of Lancashire, on a school trip," a visiting Englishman remarked, suddenly nostalgic at the sight of a hunk of bread doused with stout and melted cheese. A man sporting a large diamond ring stood to leave. "I won over a million dollars in the lottery," he said, winking conspiratorially, then brushing the shoulder of a woman at the next table. "Good luck rubs off." (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $18-$24.)

—Kate Julian

GRAND CENTRAL OYSTER BAR

Grand Central Terminal (212-490-6650)—There is a man who for many years has lunched daily at this well-loved seafood grotto on the lower level of Grand Central; his standing order is a cup of New England clam chowder. When, a few years ago, the restaurant switched brands of oyster crackers, he was deeply upset. Now, while the rest of the customers sop their soup with Westminster biscuits, the man still gets his old Nabiscos. Michael Garvey, the longtime manager, procures them by the case expressly on his behalf.

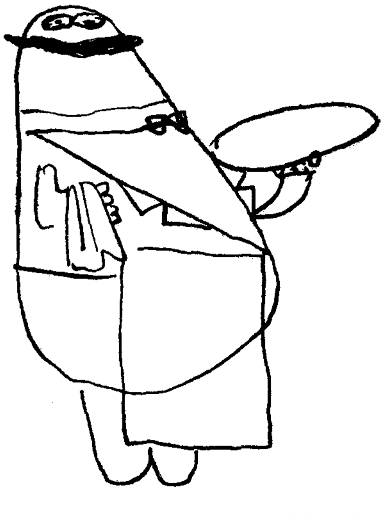
Tradition dies hard at Oyster Bar—there are the faded gingham napkins, the lint-brush-wielding bathroom attendants, the iconic sign with its hokey rainbow font. Even the customers can seem like charming relics. The other afternoon, one of the low-slung, U-shaped lunch counters, populated exclusively by businessmen in dark suits, could have been hosting a G.E. board meeting, circa 1960. The mostly solo diners wolfed down lobster rolls and flipped desultorily through the *Post* and the *News*, these clearly being the sort of men who exhaust the *Times* on the 6:27 from Stamford. Reflecting off their wing tips was the glow of white Christmas lights, strung up by the restaurant's late owner, Jerry Brody, the first winter he was there and never taken down.

Retro delights—tournedos this and hollandaise that—also define the fare; the famous panroasts (oyster, cherrystone clam, Ipswich clam, shrimp, lobster, scallop, or combination) are made with amounts of cream and butter unheard of since the heyday of Julia Child and poured, like cement, from small steam kettles. The sea urchin comes cracked open, and tastes like a mouthful of salt water. Of the oysters, the Coromandels and the Glidden Points are particularly good, but, with thirty or so types, one can lose track. Every day since the early seventies, the varieties on offer have been scratched out on a handwritten menu. Still, there's room for innovation. As Garvey admitted the other day, "We've segued into typing it now." (Open Mondays through Saturdays for lunch and dinner. Entrées $9.45-$39.95.)

—Lauren Collins

COUNTRY

90 Madison Ave., at 29th St. (212-889-7100)—This restaurant in the Carlton Hotel makes the most of its split personality. Downstairs there's a convivial café; upstairs a Tiffany-style glass dome, resembling a grape arbor, is the focal point of an elegant dining room. Presided over by the chef and owner, Geoffrey Zakarian (his other restaurant is Town), and his executive chef, Doug Psaltis, the busy kitchen manages to provide consistently enjoyable but perfectly distinct experiences.



In the café, the dark wood and the leather seats exude an upscale cool that's borne out in the menu. One evening, thick and frothy tomato fondue, spiked with pine nuts, amplified the flavor of an "artisanal" pasta, while the gnocchi layered with cheddar cheese, pancetta, and broccoli was an innovative twist on mac and cheese. There were a few out-of-place flourishes: a waiter presented a bottle of balsamic vinegar and delivered an exposition on its "twenty-year aging process" before pouring a thin stream over an appetizer of artichokes.

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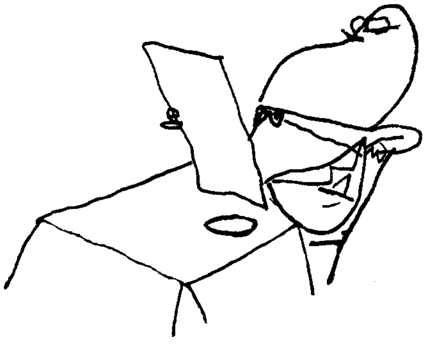
Upstairs seems more suited for seduction, with flattering lighting and cozy banquettes. The menu here is prix fixe and seasonal, with notes of whimsy, like the frog leg that arrived in a tiny bowl placed atop a lily pad, with a silver frog perched on its lip. Dishes are complex, almost confusing: a wonderful *dodine* of foie gras and pigeon came with mâche, roasted apple, and an extraordinarily gelatinous mustard jam. In the risotto, tender clams gave sharp counterpoint to the woodsy mushrooms, while crepinettes and raviolinis, filled with ricotta and chives, provided simple harmonies to the well-seasoned prime beef. The solicitous service extends even beyond the last course; when a guest expressed delight at the apple crumb cake that diners are given on the way out, the host asked, "Would you like another?" (The café is open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; the dining room is open Mondays through Saturdays for dinner. Café entrées $17-$26; dining-room prix fixe $105.)

—*Andrea Thompson*
(April 10, 2006)

BOUCHON BAKERY

10 Columbus Circle (212-823-9366)—The Time Warner Center is slightly fancier than your regular suburban shopping center. Instead of Hot Topic, you have Armani Exchange; in place of the Sunglass Hut, Solstice; and rather than Sbarro there is Bouchon Bakery, Thomas Keller's version of casual dining. For the real mall experience, you can line up at the takeout counter, where sandwiches (like the roasted turkey, which has a tangy slaw replacing the usual lettuce), salads, and numerous lovely pastries are displayed in brightly lit cases.

A few steps away, on the third-floor mezzanine, the more formal dining area looks unfortunately like an afterthought. The staff has some difficulty maintaining the rigor of a seating chart when the space is demarcated only by waist-high barriers: one weekend afternoon, the hostess was forced to chase down some errant guests who started hunting for a table on their own. And it feels a bit odd to order foie-gras terrine or *pâté de campagne* while snug under a Samsung sign. At least there's the view, through the atrium's soaring glass windows, of Columbus Circle and Central Park; the flood of sunshine makes the affectation of wearing sunglasses indoors seem less absurd.



Despite the incongruities of the setting, the food can be transporting, especially for the weary shopper. The salmon rillettes, smoked and fresh fish under a thick layer of butter, arrive in a tiny glass jar; tartines—of roast pork or tuna niçoise—are delicately portioned atop chewy bread. And there are twists on comfort-food classics: the roast-beef sandwich, with carmelized onion and Fontina cheese, is a Main Line version of the cheesesteak, and P. B. & J. appears in the guise of a cashew-nut-and-apricot-jam sandwich, with a side of banana chips. Even the desserts flirt with the high and the low: one might indulge in the *cacahuètes et chocolat*, a complicated layering of peanut butter, caramel, and chocolate; or the T.K.O., Keller's punning version of the Oreo—two chocolate cookies held together by whipped cream. You won't find anything like it at Mrs. Fields. (Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées $9.75-$30.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

NOODLE PUDDING

38 Henry St., Brooklyn (718-625-3737)—If you set out to create the epitome of a decent neighborhood restaurant, you'd probably arrive at something a lot like Noodle Pudding. The room would be informal—exposed brick, perhaps an old stove against a wall, slightly eccentric light fixtures. There would be locals drinking at the bar and large round tables with families noisily celebrating birthdays. On busy nights, there would be a pleasing atmosphere of barely controlled chaos, as a friendly staff made sure that there were enough menus—indeed, chairs—to go around.

Noodle Pudding's quietly excellent Italian cooking avoids both the attention-seeking chic of modern Italian cuisine (no fennel pollen here) and the caloric suicide of "Sopranos"-style fare. The menu is large, with some twenty daily specials supplementing a similar number of permanent dishes. There is usually some kind of homemade black squid-ink pasta with seafood—spaghetti with scorpion fish, say, or fettuccine with octopus, calamari, and mussels—and it always tastes as if it were made about five minutes before. Lasagna works the same way: the recipes vary daily (wild boar; mushroom and leek; squash and pork sausage), and the result is always hearty and never overwhelming. The usual meats—osso buco, short ribs, pork chops—are outstanding, as is the velvety calf's liver *alla veneziana*, but salty potatoes and leeks upstage the perfectly decent half chicken they garnish.

All Italian restaurants have tiramisu, but rarely does it achieve quite this feathery delicacy. Best of all is the lemon-goat-cheese cake, an ingenious exercise in texture that manages to be simultaneously creamy and breadlike. Noodle Pudding doesn't have noodle pudding, however, nor does its name have anything to do with the familiar Jewish kugel. The restaurant's owner, Antonio Migliaccio, is from Ischia, an island near Naples, where *migliaccio* is a sweet dish, traditionally consumed at carnival, made with pasta, eggs, and orange peel. Pity he doesn't serve it. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner. Entrées $8.95-$24.)

—*Leo Carey*
(April 3, 2006)

PRUNE

54 E. 1st St. (212-677-6221)—On an overcast fall Sunday morning, the crowd on the sidewalk, peering in through French windows of this cozy restaurant, seemed to outnumber the seats available inside. People crouched on the cement, paper cups of coffee in hand, sharing sections of the *Times*. Every so often, the peppy, mop-haired host would emerge to defuse the tension. "I'm not ready to seat anyone yet, so don't get too excited," he said. "Just getting the names in order."

Inside, at the battered zinc bar, the bartender mixes up a wide range of Bloody Marys, including one with a "beef jerky swizzler," and the Chicago Matchbox, with homemade lemon vodka, pickled Brussels sprouts, white turnips, caper berries, green beans, and radishes. The food is straightforward and robust, like the fluffy, fruit-laden Dutch pancake or housemade lamb sausage, which is spicy and juicy, and sure to overshadow anything it might accompany.

This tiny, warm spot in the East Village was a revelation when it opened, in 1999; Gabrielle Hamilton, the chef and owner, gave it her childhood nickname, and set out to serve rustic yet refined fare that didn't shy away from the more gruesome parts of the animal. Its brunch has become something of a legend, but dinner produces equal, if not greater, rewards. One evening, a late seating on a reservation earned a table complimentary devilled eggs—spiked with bacon and light on paprika, they were a far cry from the party favors of Easters past. Sweetbreads were expertly fried, delicate yet firm; an omelette with feta and chestnuts had an autumnal savor. To end, a fig-and-mascarpone tart, magnificently creamy, with a crumbling, buttery crust, was effortless and sublime, much like the restaurant itself. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $21-$29.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

DONA

208 E. 52nd St. (212-308-0830)—Donatella Arpaia, who has big brown eyes, long hair, very high heels, and a number of hats, calls to mind a character out of a Preston Sturges movie. Having quit lawyering to become a restaurateur, she now hurries between Dona, which opened in March, and her other place, davidburke & donatella, on a Vespa, making a quick costume change before each appearance.

Arpaia's father is from Apulia, in southeastern Italy; the chef's family is from Crete; and the menu, a hodgepodge of Greek and Italian influences, is called "Southern European." Some of it is very good, although the less said about the "Greek inspired margarita," a lethal combination of tequila and ouzo, the better. There are some puzzling combinations (a meze platter of raw seafood with feta and watermelon), but other trans-Adriatic efforts (among them, crispy *baccalà* fried with ricotta, over *skordalia*, the Greek garlic-and-potato purée) prove addictive. Even the more straightforward dishes have some sort of complicating factor, like the slab of seared, cumin-crusted tuna that arrives with a glass of romaine broth. "You take a sip and you feel like you are eating a salad!" commands the waiter, but, really, it's like you are downing a shot of wheatgrass.

The crowd is more sedate than at davidburke & donatella, where there are cheesecake lollipops and limousines idling out front to shelter smokers when it is cold. "That whole show—the politicians, the celebrities—it's a plastic-surgery show," Arpaia confided the other evening, as she sat at Dona's bar. "This is more neighborhoody." That the neighborhood is Turtle Bay means a high density of U.N. people and expense accounts: a Scandinavian couple at one table, a large party of Japanese women at the next, groups of portly diplomat types everywhere. Meanwhile, the décor—smoked mirrors, white brick walls, zebra carpeting, apricot banquettes—suggests some other time and place entirely, perhaps Beverly Hills, circa 1984. Weirdly, it all adds up to something that feels like a real respite from the city. "People come here three times a week," Arpaia said. "In cities, restaurants are home." (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner and Saturdays for dinner. Entrées $18-$45.)

—*Kate Julian*

CLEOPATRA
IS A
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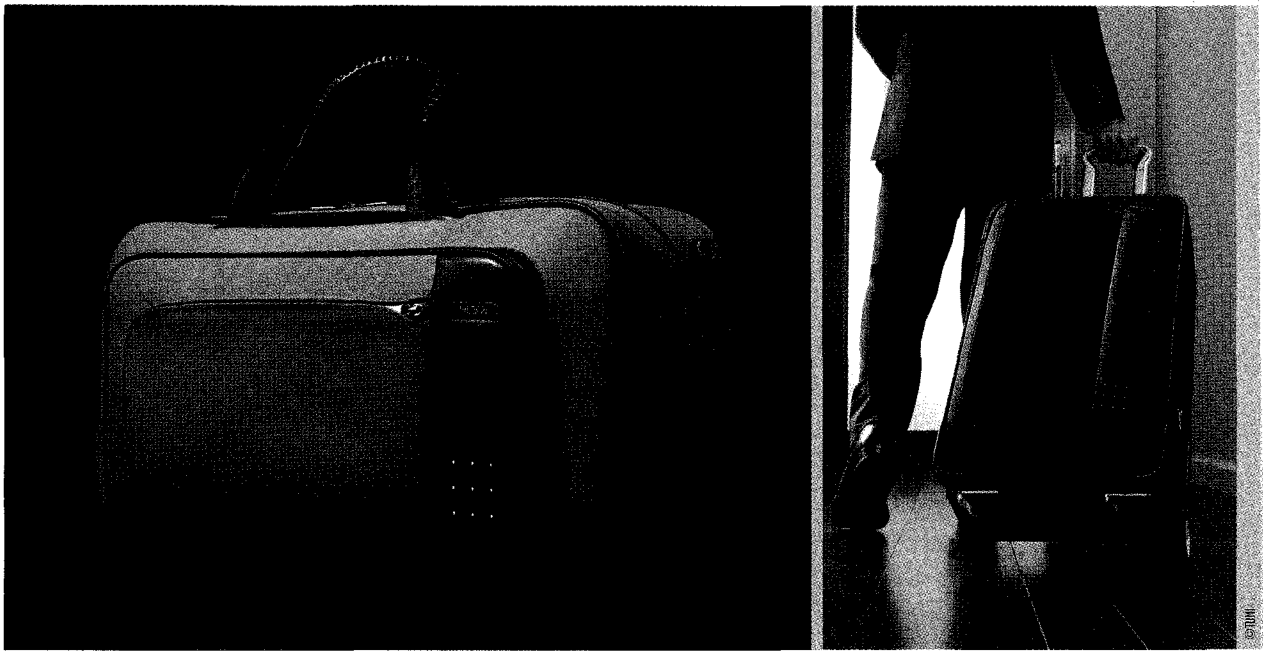

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Visit www.tumi.com to learn more about the LXT Collection, find Tumi store locations, and get information about the Tumi Tracer registry, a complimentary program that helps reunite customers with their lost or stolen merchandise.

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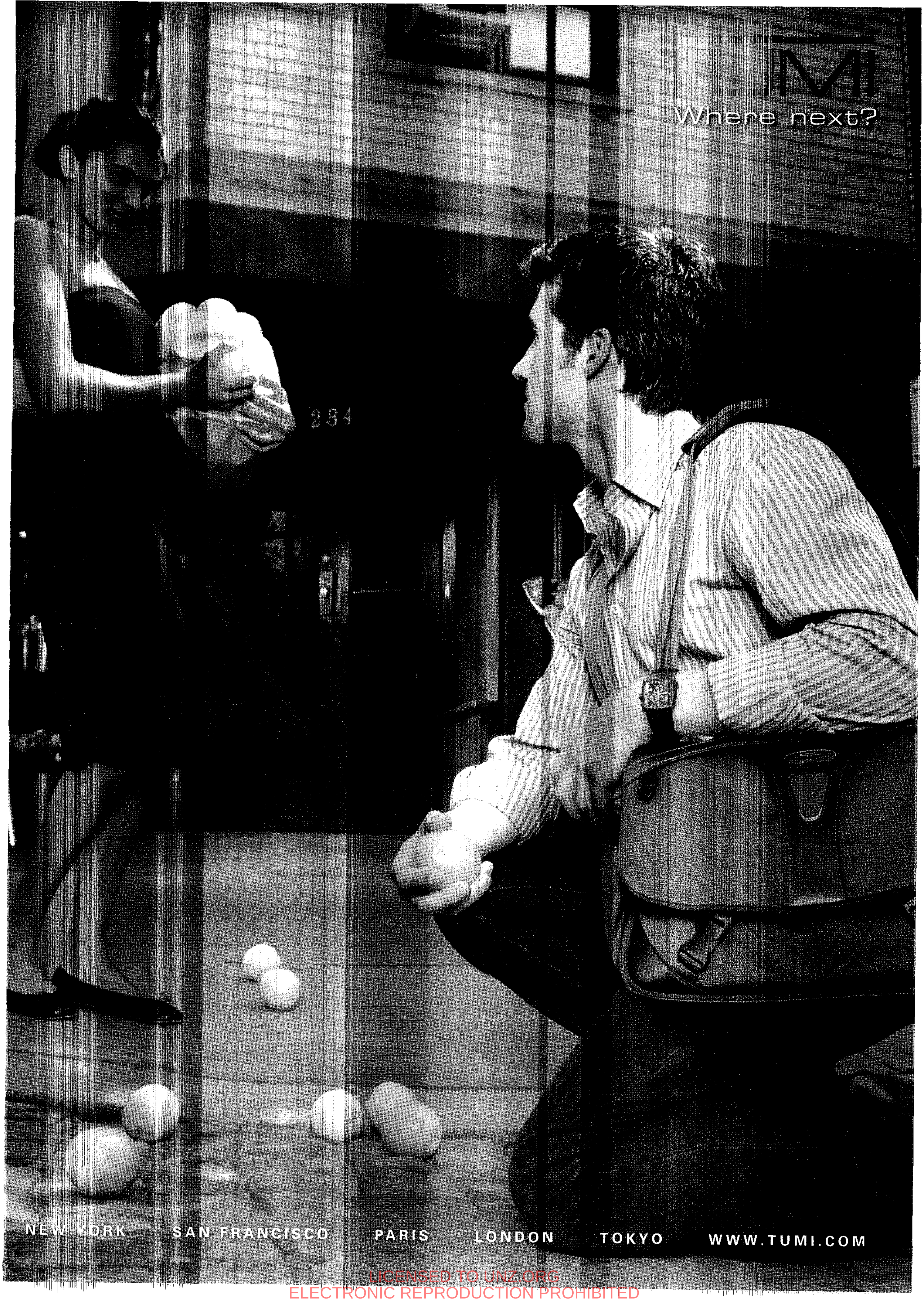
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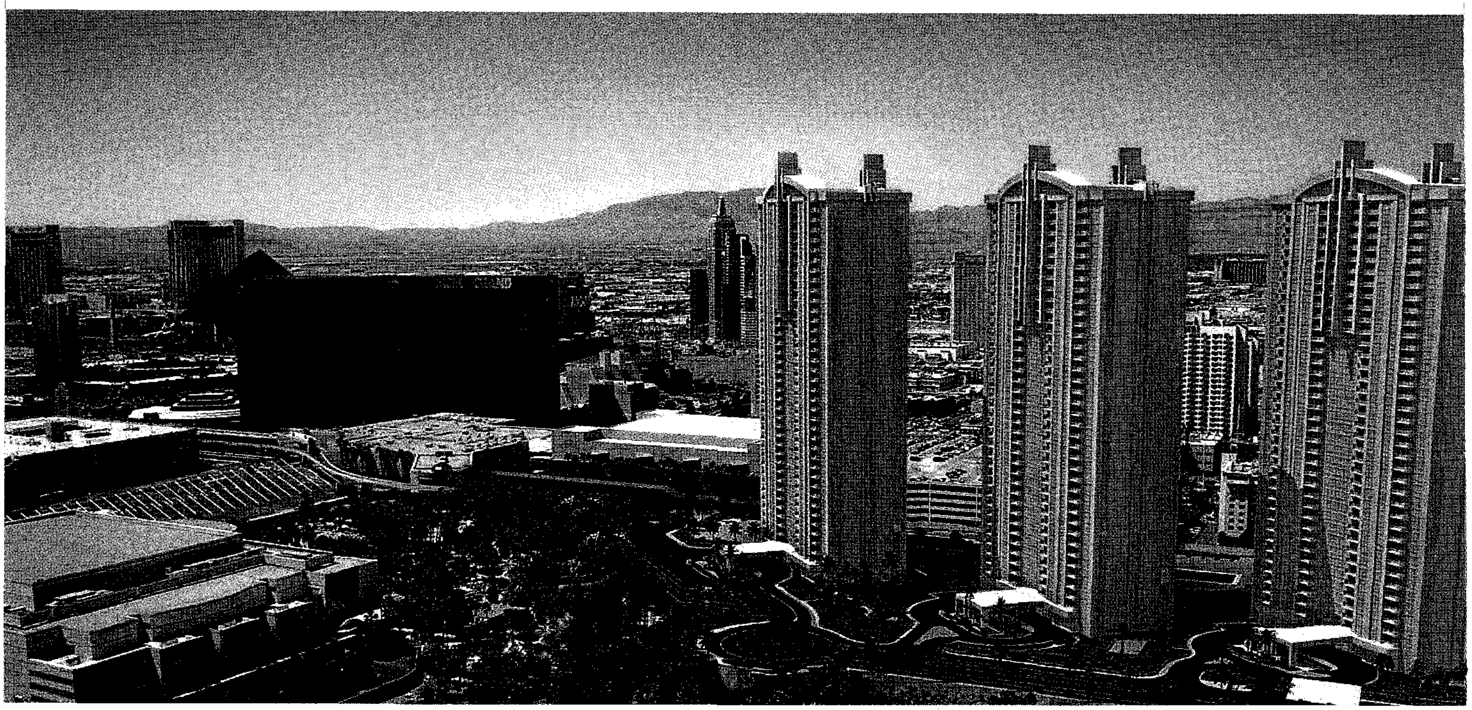

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SIGNATURE AT MGM GRAND

THE SIGNATURE AT MGM GRAND MAKING ITS DÉBUT

When the first of its three towers begins to welcome guests in May, The Signature at MGM Grand will up the ante in Las Vegas's luxury-lodgings game by offering well-heeled visitors an extraordinary new place to stay. The second tower will début in December, and the third will cossett guests starting in May, 2007.

Clad in gold mirrors, the three shimmering towers of The Signature "combine the best of two worlds: the privacy, service, and amenities of a top hotel along with the excitement of MGM Grand," explains Frederic Luvisutto, the new property's executive director.

From the moment an authorized guest is waved through the gated property entrance, he or she will find The Signature a safe harbor. Greeted personally, each guest receives a room key that accesses the elevator. There are neither hordes of tourists, nor the clattering of slot machine coins in the intimate lobby just a short distance from the Strip.

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Spacious junior and one-bedroom suites with balconies at The Signature at MGM Grand are furnished with superior amenities. Kitchen areas are equipped with Miele stove tops and ovens, Sub-Zero refrigerators (which can be stocked in advance), and Cuisinart appliances. There's a thirty-two-inch flat-screen HDTV in the living area and a ten-point-four-inch TV in the black granite and marble bathroom, which also features a Jacuzzi tub.

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- *Michael Mina's Nobhill and Seablue*
- *Stephen Hanson's Fiamma Trattoria and Bar*

After the desert sun descends, nightbirds flock to MGM Grand's distinctive bars, which include Zuri for martinis, the innovative Tabú, and the sensual Teatro. KÀ by Cirque du Soleil and the world-famous Studio 54 provide unique, high-energy entertainment.

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Mexico's Unsung Pacific Coast

IN THE SENSUOUS MEXICAN ROAD FILM "Y tu mamá también," two teenage boys entice a young woman to travel with them to a mythic beach on the Oaxaca coast. Eventually they reach it, and when the camera sweeps its pristine beauty every viewer wants to follow.

In reality it is easy to get to. Fly into Huatulco International Airport, less than an hour by plane from Mexico City or Oaxaca City, and you will be only a few miles from the splendid isolation of Playa Cacaluta, where part of the movie was shot.

Such privacy is the lure of Huatulco, where nearly forty beaches dot the curves of nine bays. Tourism development—directed and restrained by the Mexican government—treads gently here. Seventy per cent of the bay area will be preserved for migrating birds and marine creatures.

The handful of luxurious resorts includes Camino Real Zaashila, which sports a beach on Tangolunda Bay. Small hotels are clustered near the zocalo of La Crucecita, the marina of Santa Cruz, and the beach in Chahué. Boat trips departing from Santa Cruz promise scenic grandeur above and below water. Restaurants in La Crucecita serve superb Oaxacan cuisine, including *tlayudas*, a dish made from oversized tortillas.

Freedom from crowds means you can just take off and explore. Drive west about thirty miles to the exquisite turquoise bay of Puerto Angel. Highway 175 turns north from here to ascend the Sierra Madre del Sur through jungle refreshed by waterfalls. When you come to the mountaintop village of Pluma Hidalgo, you'll see the Pacific coast in panoramic view and be within visiting distance of Oaxaca's organic coffee plantations.

Sightseeing slows to a turtle's pace a few miles west at Mazunte. Here the National Mexican Turtle Center protects various species of sea turtles and their breeding grounds. In nearby Playa Ventanilla, you'll find a beach of meditative quietness and an ecotourism project run by a coöperative of families, who lead lagoon boat trips among the crocodiles.

At Puerto Escondido, a small resort center seventy miles west of Huatulco, the pace picks up with that of the waves of Zicatela Beach. Widely considered one of the world's top surfing destinations, its wave-riding competitions will be a highlight of the town's Fiesta de Noviembre, throughout the month of November.

This is about as intensely competitive as things get on the Oaxacan coast. And for visitors seeking tranquil beaches, that's the beauty of it.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: PLUMERIA FLOWERS ©JONATHAN CHAN; WOMAN WITH MESCAL ©ERIC PETERSEN; SEA TURTLES, DRIED CHILES, PUERTO ESCONDIDO ©GEORG MATZAT

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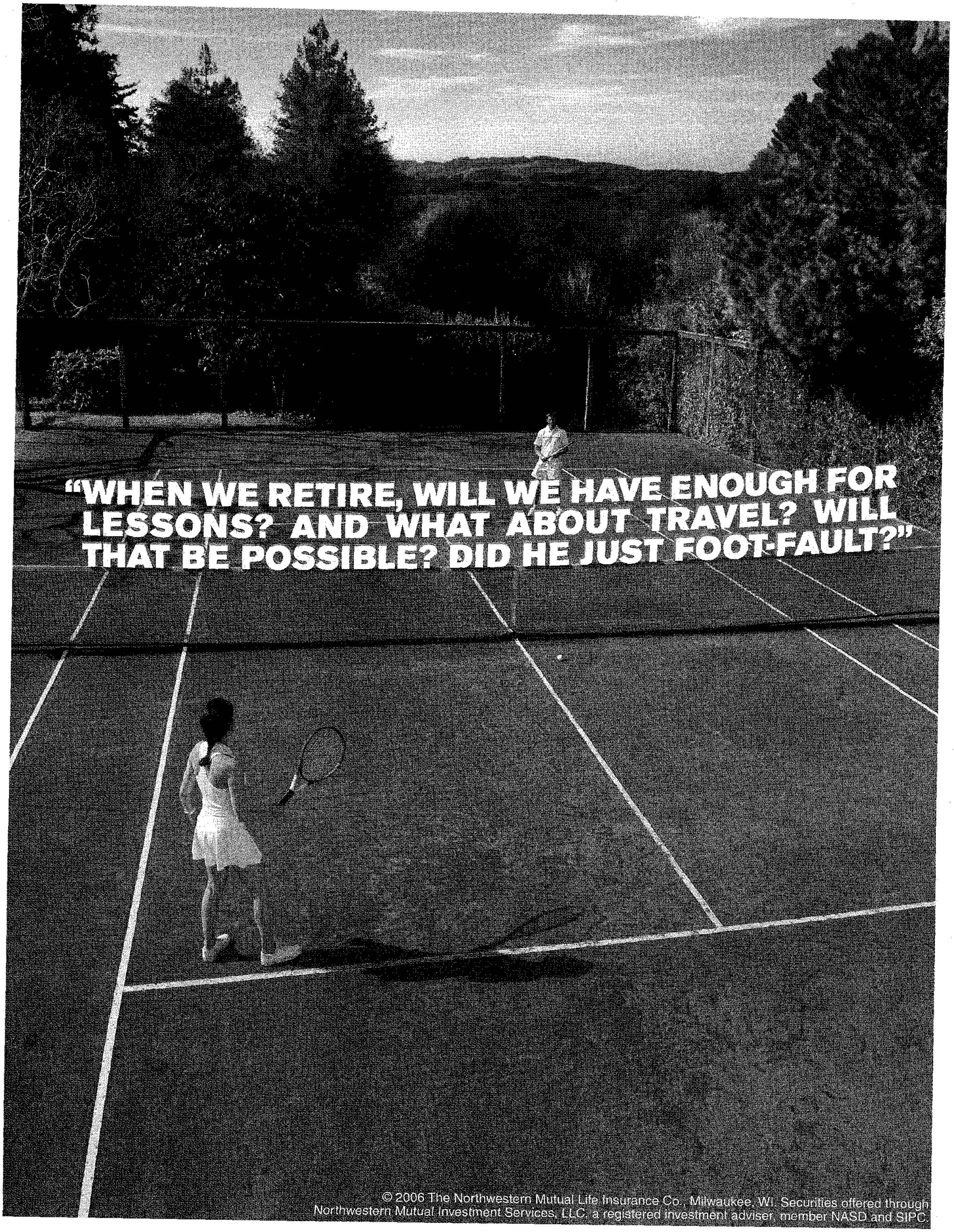
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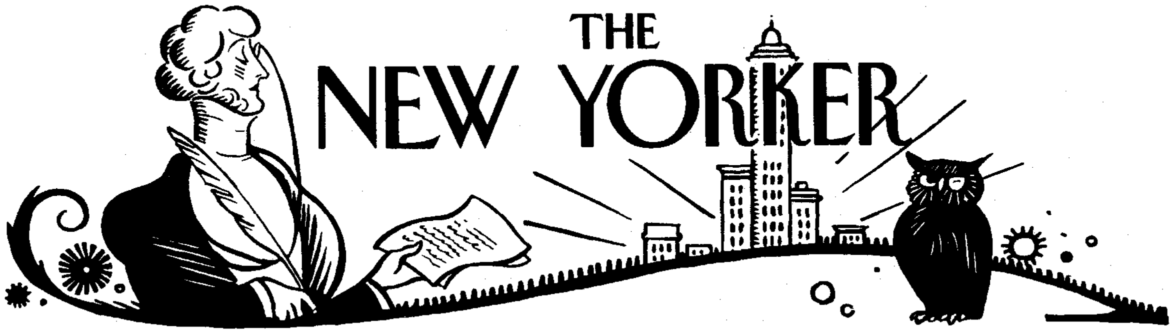


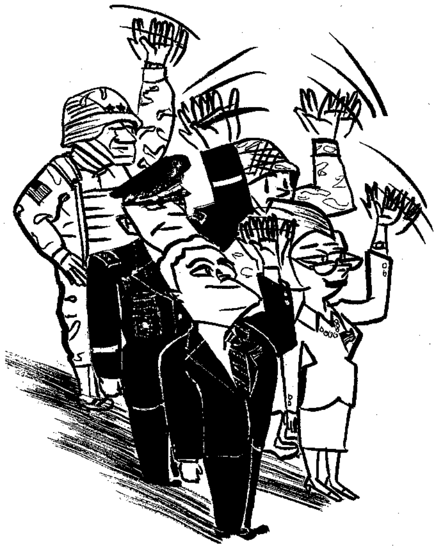
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
UNREALISTIC

We are all realists now. Iraq has turned conservatives and liberals alike into cold-eyed believers in a foreign policy that narrowly calculates national interest without much concern for what goes on inside other countries. The Republicans had their neoconservative spree and emerged this month from its smoking wreckage, in Iraq and at the polls, with nothing to steady them except the hope that two aging condottieri from the first Bush Presidency, James A. Baker III and Robert Gates, can lead the way out. These are the same men who, fifteen years ago, abandoned Afghanistan to civil war and Al Qaeda, allowed Saddam to massacre his own people, and concluded that genocide in the Balkans was none of America's business. They are not the guardians of all wisdom. At some point, events will remind Americans that currently discredited concepts such as humanitarian intervention and nation-building have a lot to do with national security—that they originated as necessary evils to prevent greater evils. But, for now, Kissingerism is king.

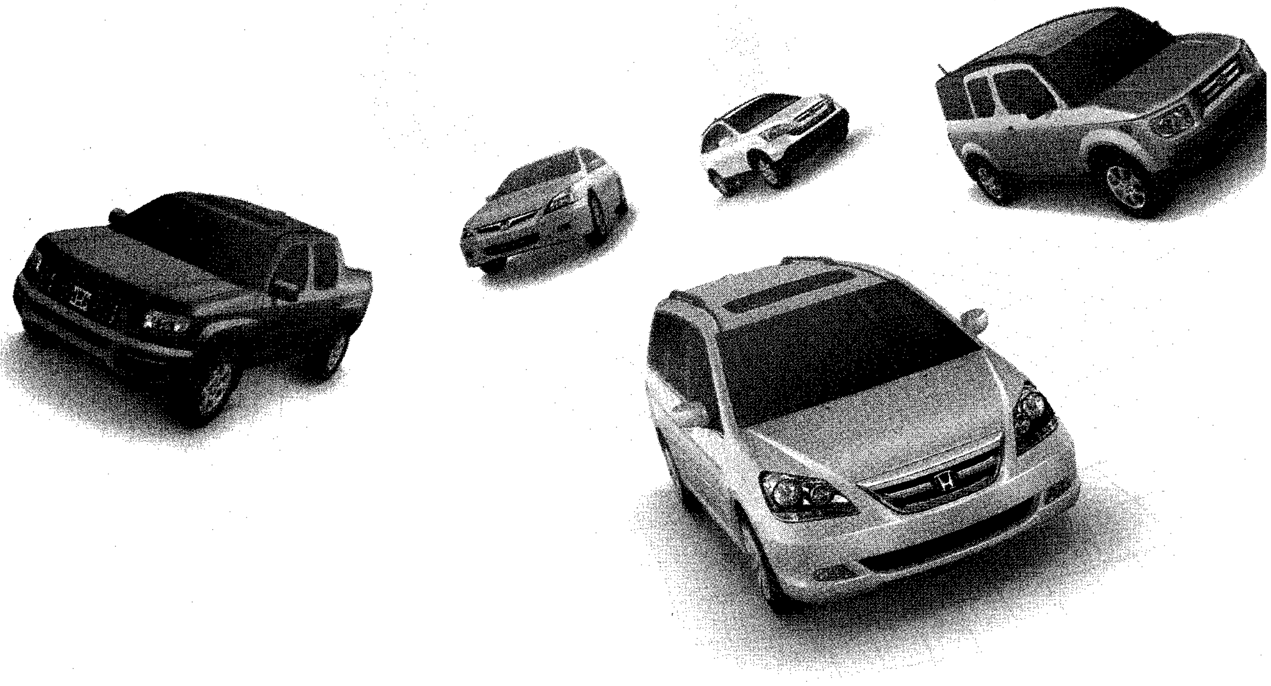
ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

And the Democrats? Since winning the midterms, they have been talking about the endgame in Iraq with a strangely serene sang-froid. Last week in the *Times*, John M. Deutch, who was the director of Central Intelligence under President Clinton, praised the nomination of Gates to replace Donald Rumsfeld, and added, "The consequences of withdrawal need not be catastrophic to American interests in the region." Also last week, on National Public Radio, Representative John Murtha, the Pennsylvania Democrat who was an early supporter of withdrawal, casually offered that, if Iraq were to fall apart in the wake of an American departure, "I don't think it'll be any worse" than the partition of the Indian subcontinent. A million people are estimated to have died in 1947 during the movement of Muslims and Hindus across the newly drawn India-Pakistan border. Sixty years and several wars later, the two countries confront each other in a nuclear standoff, trade charges of subversion, and periodically exchange fire in the Kashmiri Himalayas.



What America will gain in return for leaving Iraq, according to Murtha and other Democrats, will be the holy grail of realism: stability. "They have more confidence in their people than they do in ours," Murtha said of the Iraqis. "And I'm convinced there'll be more stability, less chaos." Former Senator George S. McGovern recently laid out a plan, in an essay he co-wrote in *Harper's*, that amounts to a series of non sequiturs: American withdrawal, followed by the evaporation of the insurgency, followed by an influx of foreign police, followed by American-funded reconstruction. A letter signed by leading House and Senate Democrats and sent to the President on October 20th called for "beginning the phased redeployment and transitioning the U.S. mission in Iraq by the end of the year." It also called for the Administration to pressure Iraqis to reach "a broad-based and sustainable political settlement." The letter represented a united Democratic position on Iraq, with signatories ranging from Nancy Pelosi to Joseph Biden, but the common front came at the expense of common sense: if American troops start leaving no matter what Iraqis do, with what additional leverage will the U.S. compel them to do what they haven't yet done?

It is true that the presence of American troops is a source of great tension and violence in Iraq, and that overwhelming numbers of Iraqis want them to leave. But it is also true that wherever Ameri-



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*Based on model year 2005 CAFE average fuel-economy ratings and weighted sales for passenger-car and light-truck fleets sold in the U.S. by major manufacturers. †Civic Hybrid and Fit Sport with 5MT shown. 2007 EPA mileage estimates: 49 city/51 highway, 33 city/38 highway, respectively. Use for comparison purposes only. Actual mileage may vary. ©2006 American Honda Motor Co., Inc. environmentology.honda.com can troop levels have been reduced—in Falluja and Mosul in 2004, in Tal Afar in 2005, in Baghdad in 2006—security has deteriorated. In the absence of adequate and impartial Iraqi forces, Sunni insurgents or Shiite militias have filled the power vacuum with a reign of terror. An American withdrawal could produce the same result on a vast scale. That is why so many Iraqis, after expressing their ardent desire to see the last foreign troops leave their country, quickly add, "But not until they clean up the mess they made." And it is why a public-service announcement scrolling across the bottom of the screen during a recent broadcast on an Iraqi network said, "The Ministry of Defense requests that civilians not comply with the orders of the Army or police on nightly patrols unless they are accompanied by coalition forces working in that area."

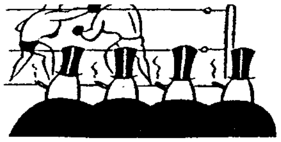
The argument that Iraq would be better off on its own is a self-serving illusion that seems to offer Americans a win-win solution to a lose-lose problem. Like so much about this war, it has more to do with politics here than reality there. Such wishful thinking (reminiscent of the sweets-and-flowers variety that preceded the war) would have pernicious consequences, as the United States fails to anticipate one disaster after another in the wake of its departure: ethnic cleansing on a large scale, refugees pouring across Iraq's borders, incursions by neighboring armies, and the slaughter of Iraqis who had joined the American project.

With the Democrats about to take over Congress, the Iraq Study Group preparing to release its report, a team of military officers drafting new strategies at the Pentagon, and Rumsfeld heading into an ignominious retirement, the war has reached a moment of reckoning in Washington. Though it may well be too late, politically a new Iraq policy is finally possible. It should use every ounce of America's vanishing leverage to get the Iraqi factions, including insurgent and militia leaders and their foreign backers, to sit together in a room, with all the vexing issues of political power and economic resources before them. The U.S. government should announce that decisions about troop levels, including withdrawal, would depend on, not precede, the success or failure of the effort. An official involved with the Democratic congressional leadership said last week that political compromise and a gradual lessening of violence could allow the U.S. to reduce its numbers over the next eighteen months to thirty thousand troops, with other countries, including Muslim ones, convinced that it's in their interest to fill the gap with peacekeepers. If America is already heading for the exit, no one will want to have anything to do with Iraq except to pick at its carcass.

Ultimately, it's up to the President. The man who still holds that office may not want a new policy. And even if he does, it may not work. We may have to accept that the disintegration of Iraq is irreversible and America's last remaining interest will be to leave. If so, we shouldn't deepen the insult by pretending that we're doing the Iraqis a favor. Even realism has an obligation to be realistic.

—George Packer

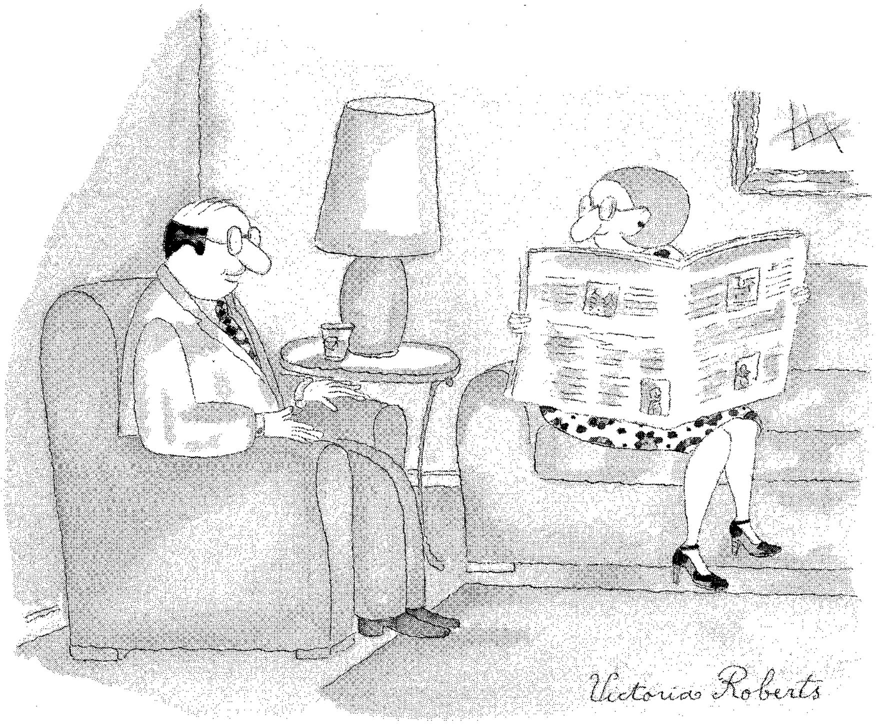
IN THE RING
THE OTHER KAZAKH VISITOR



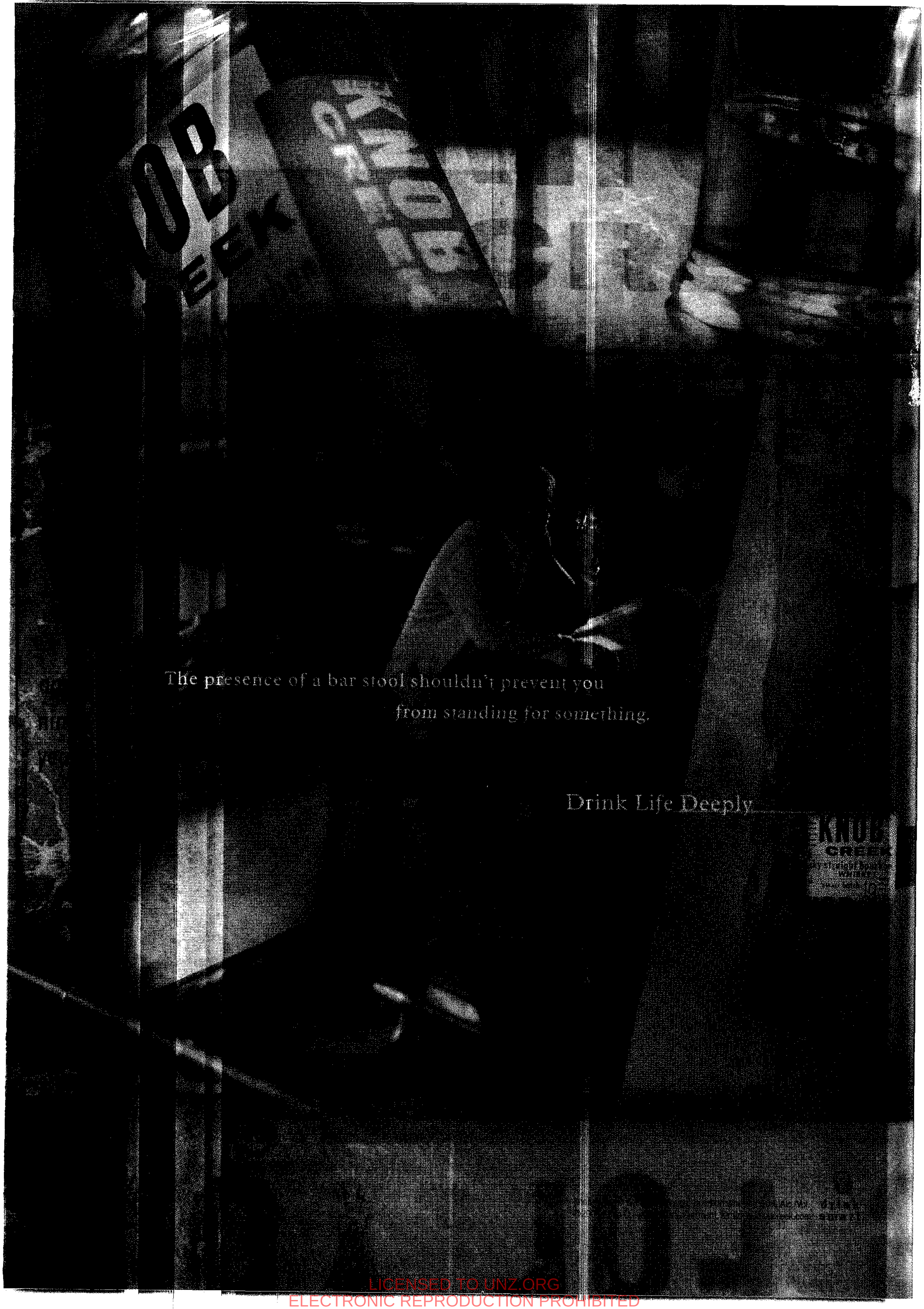
Wladimir Klitschko's recent New York adventure began in relative anonymity, which was odd, given that he is the heavyweight champion of the world. He first arrived in town in September, checked into the Embassy Suites in lower Manhattan, and made his way about the city without an entourage. "It is such a nice feeling if people recognize you and shake your hand," Klitschko said. "But there are issues more important in life."

He had come to town to defend his title, or, more precisely, his two-fifths share. Boxing's five sanctioning bodies now recognize four champions (Klitschko is the champion of the International Boxing Federation and the International Boxing Organization), who—with the exception of the new World Boxing Organization champion, Shannon Briggs—share with Klitschko the distinction of coming from the former Soviet Union. Klitschko is Ukrainian. He was born in Kazakhstan, but he has a house in Las Vegas, often stays with his brother in Los Angeles, and spends a good deal of time in Kiev and Hamburg, where he is extremely popular. His mother is after him to get married.

Klitschko is thirty years old. He is six feet five—tall even by heavyweight standards—broad across the shoulders and chest, and tapered at the waist. He speaks four languages, plays chess, and comports himself with the air of a man



"Every year around this time, I ask myself, 'Did I make a dent?'"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from standing for something.
Drink Life Deeply
KNOB CREEK

capable of thinking beyond the next payday. He was eager to fight at Madison Square Garden; his late mentor, the German heavyweight Max Schmeling, advised him that the good money was to be made in New York. Klitschko does his own promoting and insists that it was he who negotiated the terms of the Garden fight. "I don't want to be a mechanism in a system without being asked what I want," he said.

The man chosen to fight him was Calvin Brock, known as "the Boxing Banker." Brock is a college graduate who spent nine months as an entry-level analyst at Bank of America. The champ, however, had the advantage in height, weight, reach, and academic credentials: Klitschko holds a Ph.D. in sports sciences and philosophy from the University of Kiev (dissertation topic: "pedagogic control over young athletes, ages fourteen to nineteen," in the old Soviet system).

Boxing has always been the most tribal of sports, and so it came as no surprise that when Klitschko appeared in the ring on fight night the Garden was awash in pale-blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flags. People wrapped the flags around their shoulders and chanted his name.

At the opening bell, Klitschko strode to the center of the ring, where he greeted Brock with a stiff jab to the face. The crowd was delighted, and grew ever more so as Brock spent the early rounds looking like a man trying a series of locked doors, searching for a way inside. Klitschko is a formalist in the ring, an approach that tends to please only boxing purists. Against Brock, he proceeded with an earnest caution that, by the fourth round, had many in the crowd booing even as Brock's face grew puffy. In the sixth round, Brock managed to open a nasty cut just under Klitschko's left eyebrow, and as blood streaked down his cheek the locals started chanting, "U.S.A., U.S.A."

Klitschko's cornermen managed to stanch the bleeding before the seventh round and then dispatched the champion in the hope that he could finish things up before Brock could undo their handiwork. Klitschko picked up the pace and at last began throwing combinations that found their mark. Brock looked increasingly confused. Later, he would admit that he never saw, but certainly felt, the right hand to the head that Klitschko threw with fifty seconds remaining in the round.

Brock landed on his stomach. Klitschko stepped over him. He climbed onto the ropes in each corner of the ring and acknowledged the cheers by applauding for the crowd. People chanted, "*Molodyets!*" ("Great job!") Neither the champ nor his fans seemed in a hurry to leave.

—*Michael Shapiro*

DEPT. OF HOOPLA

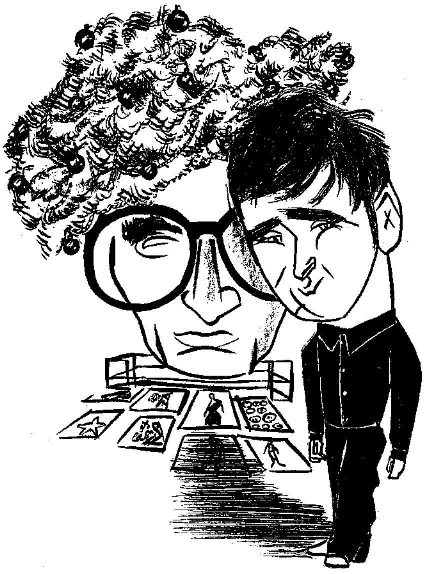
SHY VIOLET

At a dinner held for Raf Simons, the reclusive Belgian designer, in New York the other day, the guest of honor was seated across from a human butterfly. The butterfly—actually a mannequin wearing a messy white wig and Technicolor wings—was supposed to be Andy Warhol. Simons was supposed to be the life of the party. It was a role he assumed reluctantly: for the past ten years, Simons, who designs for his own labels and was hired last year to be the designer for Jil Sander, has avoided public appearances.

The dinner was held at a Barneys warehouse, on Ninth Avenue, amid a jumble of giant blinking props that were being assembled for the store's Christmas window displays. The windows' theme was Happy Warhol-idays, chosen by Simon Doonan, Barneys' longtime creative director. Doonan eyed the decorations—illuminated Campbell's-soup labels, silk screens of Liza Minnelli, and an enormous head (of Warhol) stuffed with flashing lights and china. "I admire Raf enormously, but I don't relate to his aesthetic," Doonan said. "He has this restraint—when I'm around it, I feel like Coney Island. It's like Liberace meeting Jean-Paul Sartre. It's like Joan Collins meeting Simone de Beauvoir." He went on, "As a display person, I relate more to Warhol than to Raf. He was a gigantic populist. He wanted to be on TV. Raf is very self-effacing. He is a designer for the cognoscenti. He's not, like, about to get a license at Wal-Mart. But they're both fairly sphinxlike. Truman Capote said that Andy is a sphinx without a secret. Raf is a sphinx with a secret. He's a mysterious figure, and I think that's worked very much in his favor."

It had taken Barneys' fashion director, Julie Gilhart, more than a year to persuade Simons, who lives in Antwerp, to come to New York. "The idea was to do an intimate dinner and then afterward open up the doors to his cult followers—he has a lot of street kids who are into him," she said. "Raf is part of a movement that is about quality and integrity in design, as opposed to where we have been in fashion lately—everything over the top, much more extravagant, more blingy."

Simons, who is thirty-eight, stood near a crate of plastic Santa lights. He had a boxy haircut and wore bright-white tennis shoes and a collared shirt buttoned up all the way. He'd brought his design team with him from Belgium. "We are the Charlie's Angels," one of his assistants joked, holding his arms up in the air. "I chop off my wings!" He made a chopping motion. Then he pointed to Simons. "No, we are just crazy Belgium people. Raf is the visionary. *He* is the Charlie's Angel."



Raf Simons

After dinner, Simons headed out for the after-party wearing a puffy baseball jacket. He said he liked the party décor. "It felt like the days between Christmas and New Year, this comfortable feeling

Dear Genentech,

Several years ago my husband died in a car accident. Our daughter, Julia, was then only three years old. I immersed myself in caring for Julia and was proud of us for soldiering on. A year-and-a-half later I was diagnosed with a very aggressive form of cancer. I was distraught. I was fearful for myself but even more panic-stricken for my daughter. After some research, I entered a clinical trial using one of Genentech's therapies. With the results I've gotten, I now feel like one of the lucky ones. Thank you, Genentech. I hope you realize the difference you make.

Jeri Lynn Cohen
San Francisco, California

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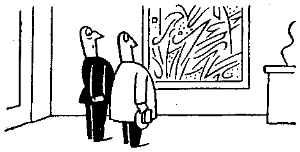
IN BUSINESS FOR LIFE

when you're not so stressed about all the things you need to be doing. I like very much being cozy at home with candles. It sounds very tacky. People always think I'm not like that, but I'm very homey." In the car, he spoke about his day walking around Chelsea. "I went everywhere," he said. He made his fingers into legs and imitated the sound of footsteps on the pavement: "*Da-da-da-da.*"

At the party, at a Lower East Side club called 205, almost a hundred people spilled onto the street. "This is the place?" Simons asked. "Oh, my God. Maybe we don't get in." For a few minutes, he stood politely at the edge of the sidewalk. The street kids, his followers, did not seem to notice him. A few elbowed past. "I can't figure out, is this party straight or gay?" a girl asked a friend. After a few minutes, a bouncer emerged: "Please, people, step back!" The door slammed shut. Simons looked around patiently. On the far side of the crowd, his assistants had just arrived, and they were waving and calling his name. Simons picked his way through the mob and spoke quietly to the bouncer. Then, one by one, he motioned his friends through the door.

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

IN THE MUSEUMS
DO NOT TOUCH



Before Nuria Chang went blind, at the age of eight, she had wanted to be an artist. When she was one, she could draw a human figure; at four, she was using perspective to sketch her bedroom. Still, by the time she lost her eyesight she had never really seen any art, so she grew up with no sense of what it was supposed to look like. (She is from Ecuador, and moved to New York in 1963.) That changed around fifteen years ago, when a ceramics instructor escorted her to the Museum of Modern Art, stood her in front of a sculpture, and encouraged her to touch it. In violation of the museum's rules, she reached out and felt what seemed to be a leg. This was a human figure, apparently. She felt some more, then exclaimed, "Oh, it's a naked man!"

Since then, Chang has become a MOMA regular. She often visits under the auspices of a museum program for people who are sight-impaired. A lecturer leads them through the galleries, describes paintings to them, and encourages them to touch a few sculptures. There have been no mishaps, although there was one session, in the sculpture garden, when a visitor's Seeing Eye dog relieved itself.

Chang is now a sculptor, but at MOMA she has come to favor the paintings of Picasso. "If I could see, I'd be painting something similar," she said. "I still think in color. When a person talks to me, I visualize his face, and as he pronounces words I imagine his lips."

One morning earlier this month, Chang and six others who were either blind or partially blind gathered on the fifth floor of the museum. Along with their lecturer, Amir Parsa, a poet and a writer, they had the galleries to themselves. They gathered around a Seurat—"Port-en-Bessin" (1888)—and Parsa began to describe it, in a didactic and modulating tone: "The very bottom third is what you might think of as land; a body of water occupies the upper two-thirds. That bottom third is a greenish earth-color tone that suggests this landmass to us, and above that we have bluish hues that determine this watery body. You really have a lot of horizontals." It was hard to see it, if you couldn't see it, but the visitors were rapt, re-creating Seurat on the gallery walls of their minds. "He actually uses only dots, small dots," Parsa went on. "He uses the very tip of the brush to create what we just described as a scene, and he does not mix colors, meaning that these small dots, juxtaposed with each other, in a complementary manner, create this effect."

"Excuse me," Chang said. "So when the artist wants to create different shades of color he will use primary colors and mix those dots so that from far away it will look like different shades?" Parsa nodded. "And also," Chang went on, "what I feel is that maybe the shapes are not perfect, but our imagination adds to them and makes them perfect."

The next stop was a series of sculptures by Matisse—five heads of Jeannette. A sign next to them read "Please Do Not Touch." Parsa described the progression from one head to the next. Then everybody put on polyethylene gloves and began touching. The gloves made a rustling sound. This group tended to start with the small features and proceed to a fuller caress of the entire head, a sense of the whole proceeding from its parts. A man named Dennis Sparacino, a professional singer and a "dedicated decadent," pinched Jeannette's nostrils, felt her lips, then her chin and eyes and cheekbones, and only then did he wrap his hands around the skull. Moving on to the next head, he mistakenly touched the arm of the man to his right—"That's actually Richard," someone told him—and then went for Jeannette's nostrils again. "This one looks ugly," he said. "This is—not as nice a nose." He pretended to choke one, exclaiming, "I told you to stop that!"

They huddled up for some commentary. Sparacino said, "I'm not sure the artist knew what he was doing. I can see no reason for his taking these turns."

"I have another view," Chang said, with some curtness. "I feel that the artist is trying to convey that things are not the way they seem, that things may change as your feelings toward them change." It was her theory that Jeannette had spurned Matisse, and that this had altered his view of her.

"I have a question for Nuria," Sparacino said. "If Jeannette lost interest in him, did he get even with her?" Chang shrugged.

The next stop was a Duchamp readymade. Parsa's depiction was brief: "It is an actual bicycle wheel with its forks still in, turned upside down and thrust into a white four-legged wooden stool." One by one, his charges stepped forward and fondled the components. A woman gave the wheel such a brisk spin that the work nearly toppled; museum staff jumped in to steady it. Chang touched the spokes and said, "Two words come to mind: motion and stationary."

"You can get from this whatever your mind leads you to," Sparacino replied. Another member of the group announced that in her opinion Chang and Sparacino, regardless of their aesthetic differences, always had astute things to say. Everyone nodded.

After the tour was done, Chang said of Sparacino, "The thing is, I don't think Dennis was ever into doing art. We don't talk about art, he and I. We hardly ever talk. We only see each other in the museum."

—*Nick Paumgarten*

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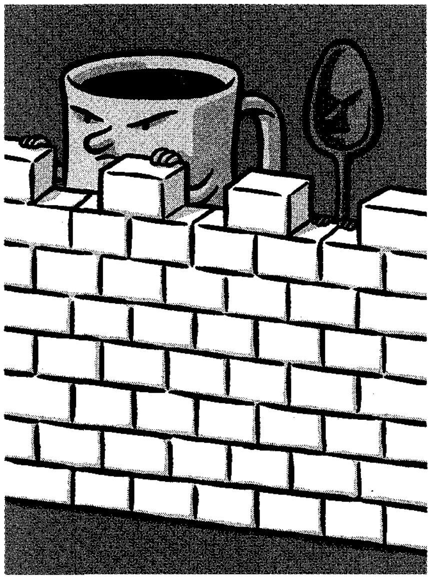
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
DEAL SWEETENERS

America has one heck of a sweet tooth. We consume more sweeteners per capita than any other country, and close to ten million tons of sugar every year. But American sugar producers aren't satisfied with supplying the most sweet-hungry population in the world. They've relentlessly sought—and received—special favors from the federal government, turning the industry into one of the most cosseted in America today. The government guarantees producers a fixed price for domestic sugar and sets strict quotas and tariffs for foreign sugar. Economically speaking, this has many obvious bad results. It keeps sugar prices in the U.S. at least twice as high as the world average. It makes it harder for companies that use lots of sugar to do business here—in the past decade, an exodus of candy manufacturers from the U.S. has eliminated thousands of jobs. And import restrictions make Third World countries poorer than they'd otherwise be. But protecting sugar also has a surprising consequence: it's hurting America's efforts to become more energy-efficient.

In recent years, as politicians have tried to deal with high gas prices, concerns about global warming, and America's dependence on OPEC, a new savior has been found: ethanol. Ethanol has all sorts of virtues. When it's blended with gasoline, it reduces greenhouse-gas emissions. Unlike fossil fuels, it doesn't get depleted over time, since it's made from biomass. And sources of ethanol can be found all over the world, unlike those of oil, which are mostly in unstable or autocratic countries that are unfriendly to the U.S. So Congress has mandated that four billion gallons of ethanol annually be blended with gasoline, and it also subsidizes ethanol production with a fifty-one-cent-per-gallon tax credit. These policies have stimulated an ethanol boom; the number of ethanol plants is set to rise by nearly fifty per cent in the next few years.

Unfortunately, the ethanol produced in the U.S. comes from a less-than-ideal source: corn. Corn ethanol's "net energy balance"—the amount of energy it yields in proportion to how much energy goes into its production—is significantly lower than that of other alternatives, and modern corn farming isn't easy on the land. By contrast, ethanol distilled from sugarcane is much cheaper to produce and generates far more energy per unit of input—eight times more, by most estimates—than corn does. In the nineteen-seventies, Brazil embarked on a program to substitute sugar ethanol for oil. Today, every gallon of gas in Brazil is blended with at least twenty per cent of ethanol, and many cars run on ethanol alone, at half the price of gasoline.

What's stopping the U.S. from doing the same? In a word, politics. The favors granted to the sugar industry keep the price of domestic sugar so high that it's not cost-effective to use it for ethanol. And the tariffs and quotas for imported sugar mean that no one can afford to import foreign sugar and turn it into ethanol, the way that oil refiners import crude from the Middle East to make gasoline. Americans now import eighty per cent less sugar than they did thirty years ago. So the prospects for a domestic-sugar ethanol industry are dim at best.



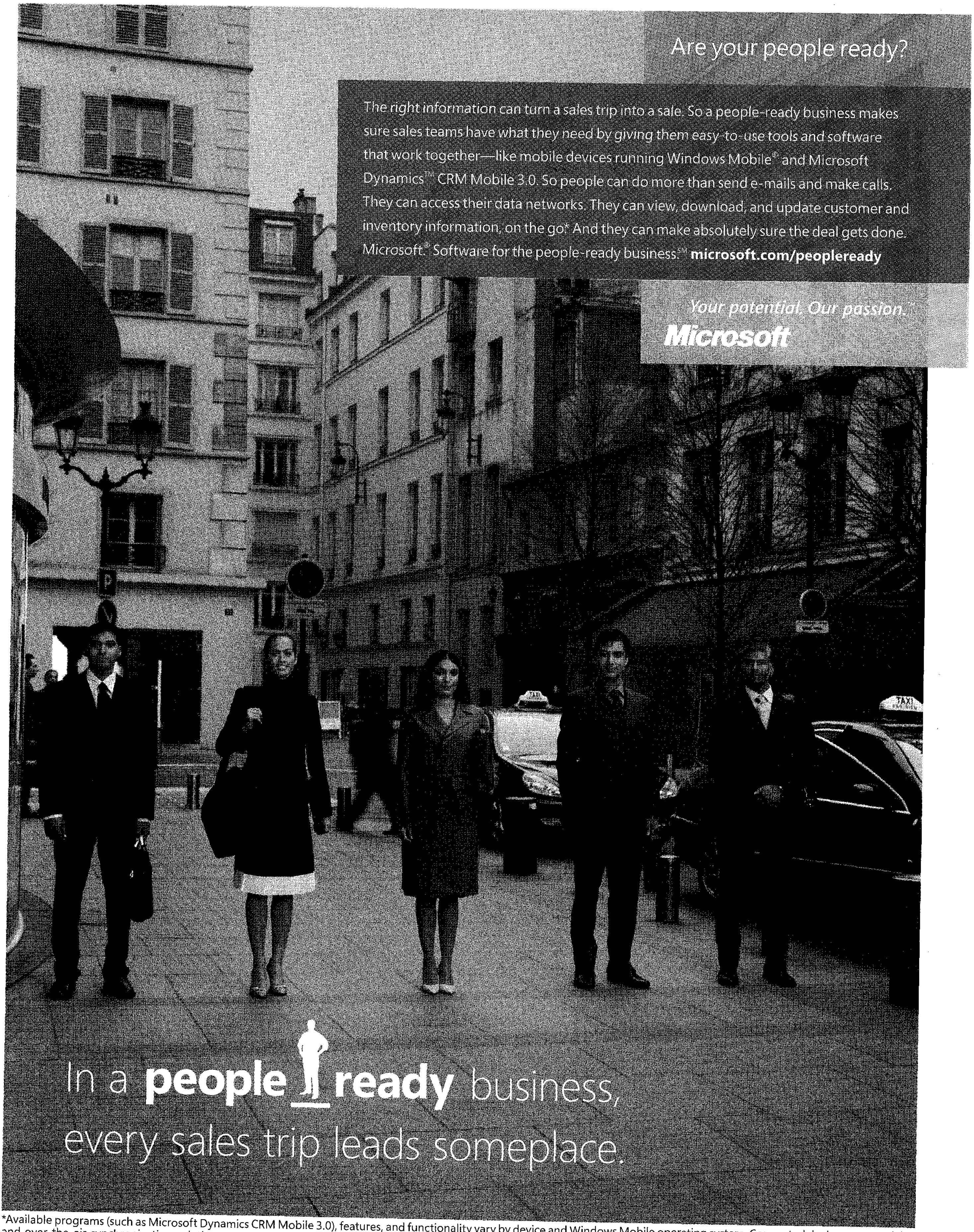
We could, of course, simply import sugar ethanol. But here, too, politics has intervened: Congress has imposed a tariff of fifty-four cents per gallon on sugar-based ethanol in order to protect corn producers from competition. A recent study by Amani Elobeid and Simla Tokgoz, scientists at Iowa State University, projected that if the tariffs were removed prices would fall by fourteen per cent and Americans would use almost three hundred million gallons more of ethanol.

But that isn't likely to happen anytime soon: the Bush Administration proposed eliminating the ethanol tariff this past spring, but Congress quickly quashed the idea—Barack Obama was among several Midwestern senators who campaigned in support of the tariff—and the sugar quotas appear to be as sacrosanct as ever. Tariffs and quotas are extremely hard to get rid of, once established, because they create a vicious circle of back-scratching—government largesse means that sugar producers get wealthy, giving them lots of cash to toss at members of Congress, who then have an incentive to insure that the largesse continues to flow. More important, protectionist rules flourish because the benefits are concentrated among a small number of easy-to-identify winners, while the costs are spread out across the entire population. It may be annoying to pay a few more cents for sugar or ethanol, but most of us are unlikely to lobby Congress about it.

Maybe we should, though. Our current policy is absurd even by Washington standards: Congress is paying billions in subsidies to get us to use more ethanol, while keeping in place tariffs and quotas that guarantee that we'll use less. And while most of the time tariffs just mean higher prices and reduced competition, in the case of ethanol the negative effects are considerably greater, leaving us saddled with an inferior and less energy-efficient technology and as dependent as ever on oil-producing countries. Because of the ethanol tariffs, we're imposing taxes on fuel from countries that are friendly to the U.S., but no tax at all on fuel from countries that are among our most vehement opponents. Congressmen justify the barriers to foreign ethanol with talk of "energy security." But how is the U.S. more secure when it has to import oil from Venezuela rather than ethanol from Brazil? These tariffs are bad economic policy, bad energy policy, and bad foreign policy. Talk about your Domino effect.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN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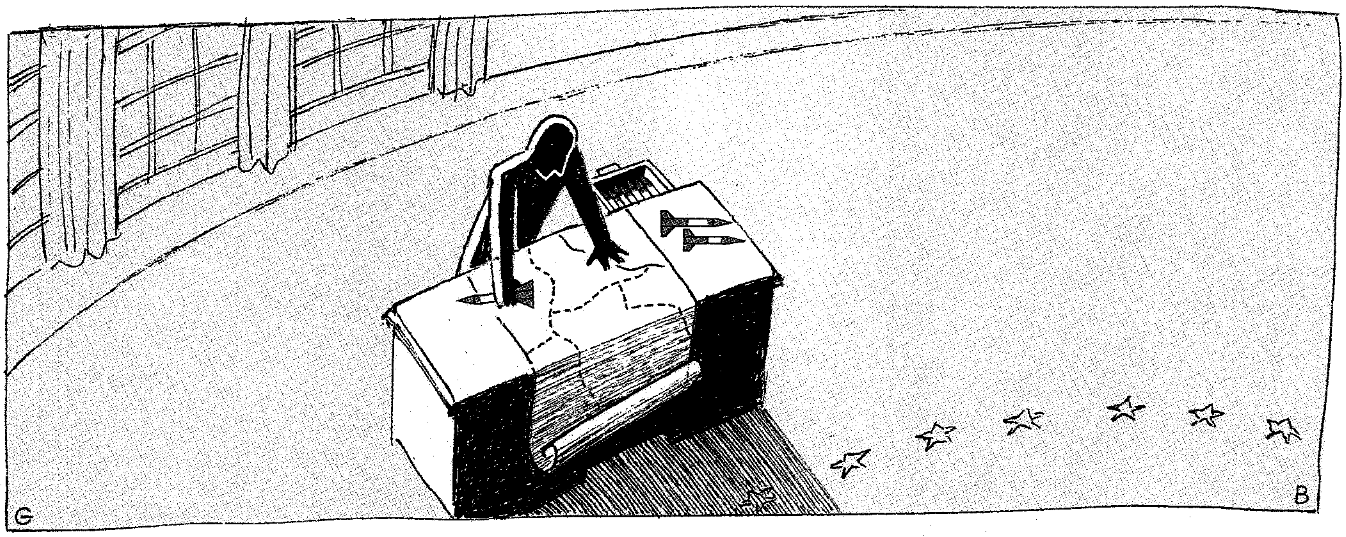
ANNALS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

THE NEXT ACT

Is a damaged Administration less likely to attack Iran, or more?

BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH



One source close to the Pentagon said, "More and more people see the weakening of Iran as the only way to save Iraq."

GUY BILLOUT

A month before the November elections, Vice-President Dick Cheney was sitting in on a national-security discussion at the Executive Office Building. The talk took a political turn: what if the Democrats won both the Senate and the House? How would that affect policy toward Iran, which is believed to be on the verge of becoming a nuclear power? At that point, according to someone familiar with the discussion, Cheney began reminiscing about his job as a lineman, in the early nineteen-sixties, for a power company in Wyoming. Copper wire was expensive, and the linemen were instructed to return all unused pieces three feet or longer. No one wanted to deal with the paperwork that resulted, Cheney said, so he and his colleagues found a solution: putting "shorteners" on the wire—that is, cutting it into short pieces and tossing the leftovers at the end of the workday. If the Democrats won on November 7th, the Vice-President said, that victory would not stop the Administration from pursuing a military option with Iran. The White House would put "shorteners" on any legislative restrictions, Cheney said, and thus stop Congress from getting in its way.

The White House's concern was not that the Democrats would cut off funds for the war in Iraq but that future legislation would prohibit it from financing operations targeted at overthrowing or destabilizing the Iranian government, to keep it from getting the bomb. "They're afraid that Congress is going to vote a binding resolution to stop a hit on Iran, à la Nicaragua in the Contra war," a former senior intelligence official told me.

In late 1982, Edward P. Boland, a Democratic representative, introduced the first in a series of "Boland amendments," which limited the Reagan Administration's ability to support the Contras, who were working to overthrow Nicaragua's left-wing Sandinista government. The Boland restrictions led White House officials to orchestrate illegal fund-raising activities for the Contras, including the sale of American weapons, via Israel, to Iran. The result was the Iran-Contra scandal of the mid-eighties. Cheney's story, according to the source, was his way of saying that, whatever a Democratic Congress might do next year to limit the President's authority, the Administration would find a way to work around it. (In response to a request for comment, the Vice-President's office said that it had no record of the discussion.)

In interviews, current and former Administration officials returned to one question: whether Cheney would be as influential in the last two years of George W. Bush's Presidency as he was in its first six. Cheney is emphatic about Iraq. In late October, he told *Time*, "I know what the President thinks," about Iraq. "I know what I think. And we're not looking for an exit strategy. We're looking for victory." He is equally clear that the Administration would, if necessary, use force against Iran. "The United States is keeping all options on the table in addressing the irresponsible conduct of the regime," he told an Israeli lobbying group early this year. "And we join other nations in sending that regime a clear message: we will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon."

On November 8th, the day after the Republicans lost both the House and the Senate, Bush announced the resignation of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and the nomination of his successor, Robert Gates, a former director of Central Intelligence. The move was widely seen as an acknowledgment that the Administration was paying a political price for the debacle in Iraq. Gates was a member of the Iraq Study Group—headed by former Secretary of State James Baker and Lee Hamilton, a for-

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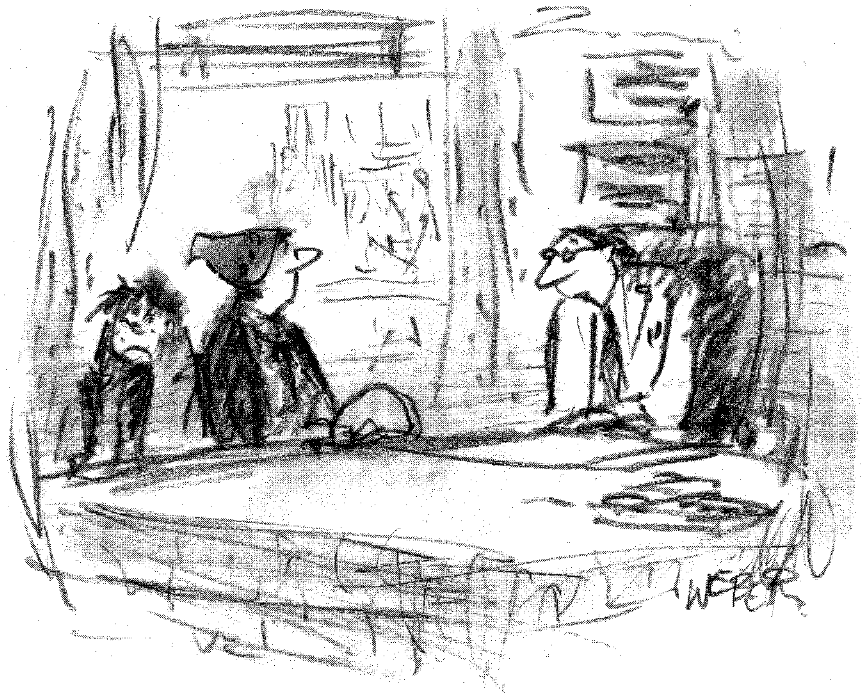


"I'm sorry, but so far medical science hasn't come up with a cure for adolescence."

mer Democratic congressman—which has been charged with examining new approaches to Iraq, and he has publicly urged for more than a year that the U.S. begin direct talks with Iran. President Bush's decision to turn to Gates was a sign of the White House's "desperation," a former high-level C.I.A. official, who worked with the White House after September 11th, told me. Cheney's relationship with Rumsfeld was among the closest inside the Administration, and Gates's nomination was seen by some Republicans as a clear signal that the Vice-President's influence in the White House could be challenged. The only reason Gates would take the job, after turning down an earlier offer to serve as the new Director of National Intelligence, the former high-level C.I.A. official said, was that "the President's father, Brent Scowcroft, and James Baker"—former aides of the first President Bush—"piled on, and the President finally had to accept adult supervision."

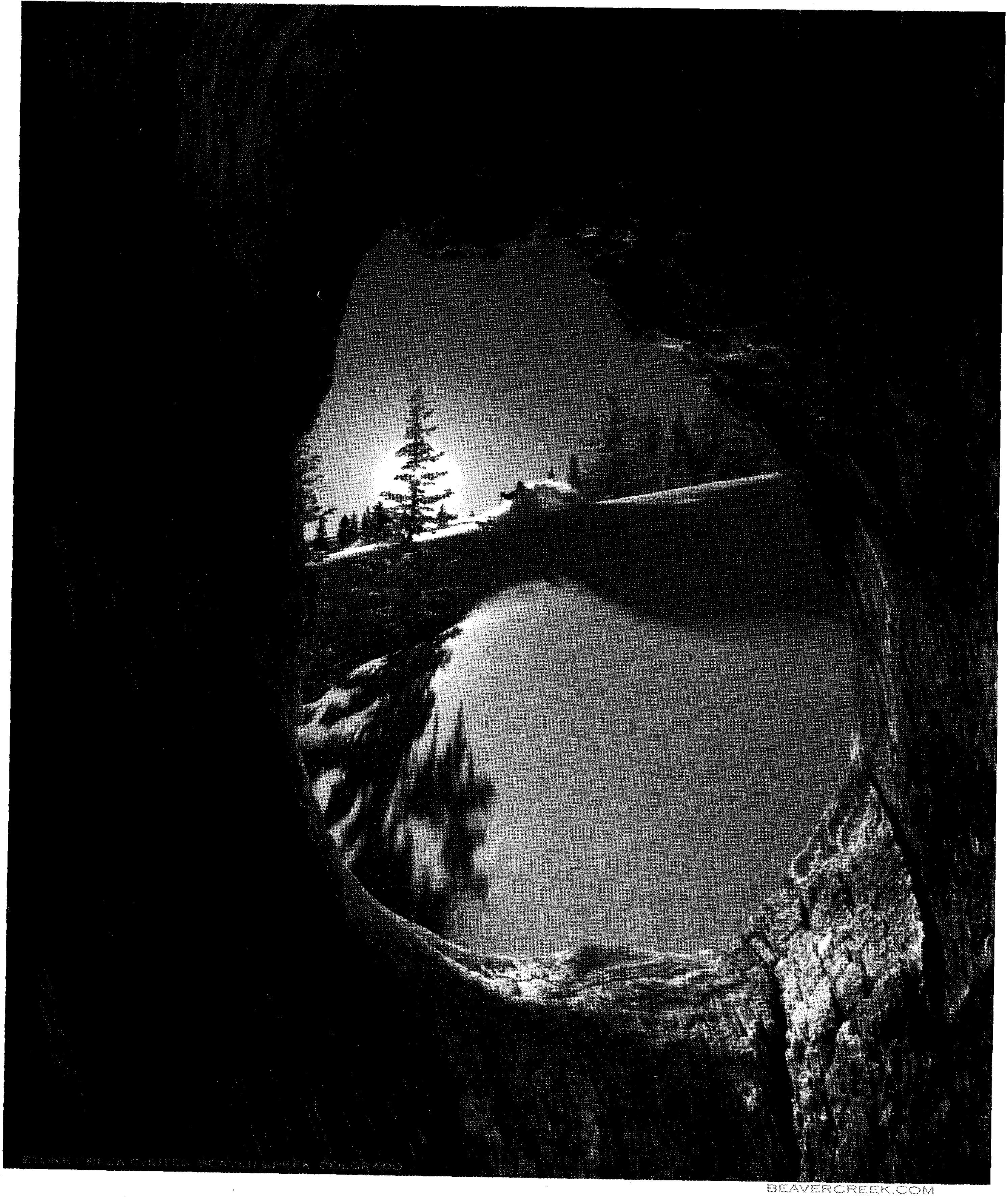
Critical decisions will be made in the next few months, the former C.I.A. official said. "Bush has followed Cheney's advice for six years, and the story line will be: 'Will he continue to choose Cheney over his father?' We'll know soon." (The White House and the Pentagon declined to respond to detailed requests for comment about this article, other than to say that there were unspecified inaccuracies.)

A retired four-star general who worked closely with the first Bush Administration told me that the Gates nomination means that Scowcroft, Baker, the elder Bush, and his son "are saying that winning the election in 2008 is more important than the individual. The issue for them is how to preserve the Republican agenda. The Old Guard wants to isolate Cheney and give their girl, Condoleezza Rice"—the Secretary of State—"a chance to perform." The combination of Scowcroft, Baker, and the senior Bush working together is, the general added, "tough enough to take on Cheney. One guy can't do it."

Richard Armitage, the Deputy Secretary of State in Bush's first term, told me that he believed the Democratic election victory, followed by Rumsfeld's dismissal, meant that the Administration "has backed off," in terms of the pace of its planning for a military campaign against Iran. Gates and other decision-makers would now have more time to push for a diplomatic solution in Iran and deal with other, arguably more immediate issues. "Iraq is as bad as it looks, and Afghanistan is worse than it looks," Armitage said. "A year ago, the Taliban were fighting us in units of eight to twelve, and now they're sometimes in company-size, and even larger." Bombing Iran and expecting the Iranian public "to rise up" and overthrow the government, as some in the White House believe, Armitage added, "is a fool's errand."

"Iraq is the disaster we have to get rid of, and Iran is the disaster we have to avoid," Joseph Cirincione, the vice-president for national security at the liberal Center for American Progress, said. "Gates will be in favor of talking to Iran and listening to the advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but the neoconservatives are still there"—in the White House—"and still believe that chaos would be a small price for getting rid of the threat. The danger is that Gates could be the new Colin Powell—the one who opposes the policy but ends up briefing the Congress and publicly supporting it."

Other sources close to the Bush family said that the machinations behind Rumsfeld's resignation and the Gates nomination were complex, and the seeming triumph of the Old Guard may be illusory. The former senior intelligence official, who once worked closely with Gates and with the President's father, said that Bush and his immediate advisers in the White House understood by mid-October that Rumsfeld would have to resign if the result of the midterm election was a resounding defeat. Rumsfeld was involved in conversations about the timing of his departure with Cheney, Gates, and the President before the election, the former senior intelligence official said. Critics who asked why Rumsfeld wasn't fired earlier, a move that might have given the Republicans a boost, were missing the point. "A week before the election, the Republicans were saying that a Democratic victory was the seed of American retreat, and now Bush and Cheney are going to change their national-security policies?" the former senior intelligence official said. "Cheney knew this was coming. Dropping Rummy after the election looked like a conciliatory move—'You're right, Democrats. We got a new guy and we're looking at all the options. Nothing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is ruled out.' " But the conciliatory gesture would not be accompanied by a significant change in policy; instead, the White House saw Gates as someone who would have the credibility to help it stay the course on Iran and Iraq. Gates would also be an asset before Congress. If the Administration needed to make the case that Iran's weapons program posed an imminent threat, Gates would be a better advocate than someone who had been associated with the flawed intelligence about Iraq. The former official said, "He's not the guy who told us there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and he'll be taken seriously by Congress."

Once Gates is installed at the Pentagon, he will have to contend with Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Rumsfeld legacy—and Dick Cheney. A former senior Bush Administration official, who has also worked with Gates, told me that Gates was well aware of the difficulties of his new job. He added that Gates would not simply endorse the Administration's policies and say, "with a flag waving, 'Go, go' "—especially at the cost of his own reputation. "He does not want to see thirty-five years of government service go out the window," the former official said. However, on the question of whether Gates would actively stand up to Cheney, the former official said, after a pause, "I don't know."

Another critical issue for Gates will be the Pentagon's expanding effort to conduct clandestine and covert intelligence missions overseas. Such activity has traditionally been the C.I.A.'s responsibility, but, as the result of a systematic push by Rumsfeld, military covert actions have been substantially increased. In the past six months, Israel and the United States have also been working together in support of a Kurdish resistance group known as the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan. The group has been conducting clandestine cross-border forays into Iran, I was told by a government consultant with close ties to the Pentagon civilian leadership, as "part of an effort to explore alternative means of applying pressure on Iran." (The Pentagon has established covert relationships with Kurdish, Azeri, and Baluchi tribesmen, and has encouraged their efforts to undermine the regime's authority in northern and southeastern Iran.) The government consultant said that Israel is giving the Kurdish group "equipment and training." The group has also been given "a list of targets inside Iran of interest to the U.S." (An Israeli government spokesman denied that Israel was involved.)

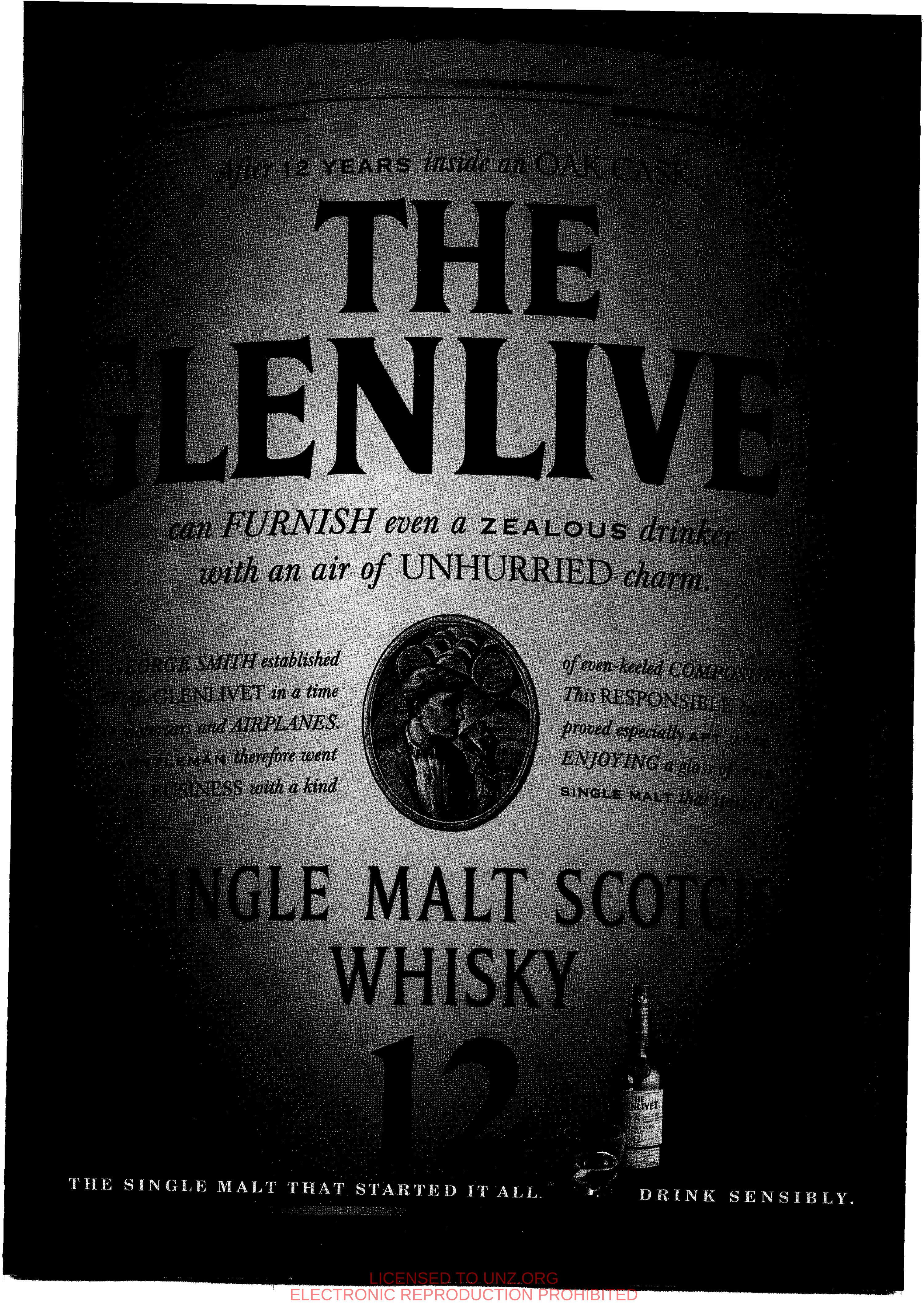
"We've put so much effort into breaking up it would be a shame not to."

Such activities, if they are considered military rather than intelligence operations, do not require congressional briefings. For a similar C.I.A. operation, the President would, by law, have to issue a formal finding that the mission was necessary, and the Administration would have to brief the senior leadership of the House and the Senate. The lack of such consultation annoyed some Democrats in Congress. This fall, I was told, Representative David Obey, of Wisconsin, the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations subcommittee that finances classified military activity, pointedly asked, during a closed meeting of House and Senate members, whether "anyone has been briefing on the Administration's plan for military activity in Iran." The answer was no. (A spokesman for Obey confirmed this account.)

The Democratic victories this month led to a surge of calls for the Administration to begin direct talks with Iran, in part to get its help in settling the conflict in Iraq. British Prime Minister Tony Blair broke ranks with President Bush after the election and declared that Iran should be offered "a clear strategic choice" that could include a "new partnership" with the West. But many in the White House and the Pentagon insist that getting tough with Iran is the only way to salvage Iraq. "It's a classic case of 'failure forward,'" a Pentagon consultant said. "They believe that by tipping over Iran they would recover their losses in Iraq—like doubling your bet. It would be an attempt to revive the concept of spreading democracy in the Middle East by creating one new model state."

The view that there is a nexus between Iran and Iraq has been endorsed by Condoleezza Rice, who said last month that Iran "does need to understand that it is not going to improve its own situation by stirring instability in Iraq," and by the President, who said, in August, that "Iran is backing armed groups in the hope of stopping democracy from taking hold" in Iraq. The government consultant told me, "More and more people see the weakening of Iran as the only way to save Iraq."

The consultant added that, for some advocates of military action, "the goal in Iran is not regime change but a strike that will send a signal that America still can accomplish its goals. Even if it does not de-



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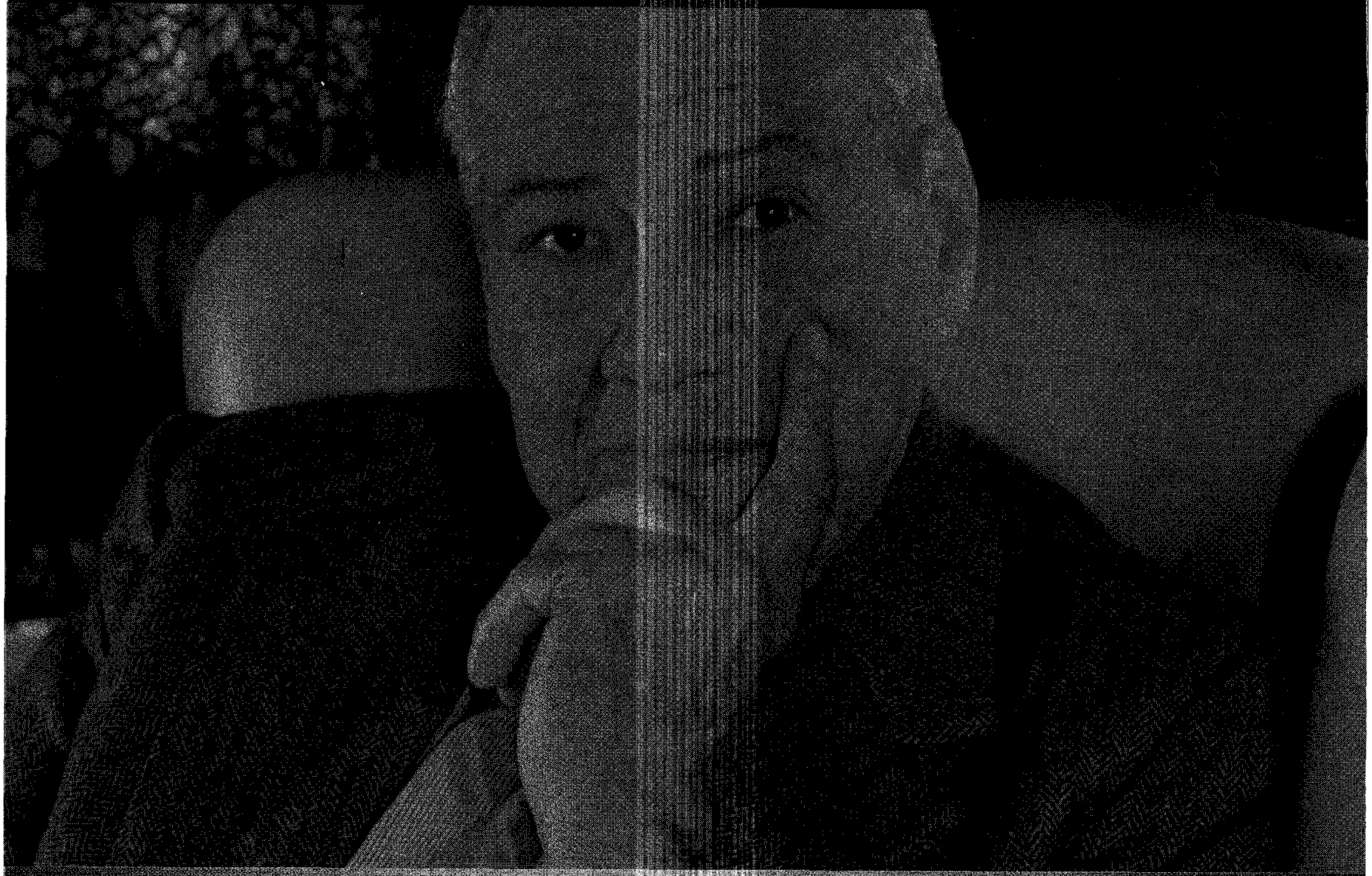

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Edelman was an actor, briefly, before he became a tanner, and the sense of theatricality has never left him. "I wanted to change the industry from black and brown, to make it as brilliant and engaging as the stage," he recalls. His debut came fifty-five years ago, when he and his wife, Teddy—the color expert of Teddy and Arthur Edelman Limited—introduced colorful crocodile shoes to wild fashion acclaim. Today, the Connecticut-based Edelmans are devoted to interiors and furniture, offering designers glove-soft upholstery and sturdy floors and rugs in seven hundred colors and sixty textures.

They find inspiration everywhere, in their travels and art as well as edgy fashion. From French Art Nouveau and Tiffany glass to Istanbul's spice market, they translate whatever captivates them. "We have a ball!" Arthur says of their working lifestyle. It is as fast-forward as the MTV series "Pimp My Ride," which features Edelman leathers.

Edelman's heart, however, lies with the rare leathers he continues to make with very slow, old-fashioned, vegetable-based tanning. His latest effort is a rubbed and polished, pebble-textured Scottish grain leather chair. Edelman says, "It develops a patina, and it never wears out. You can bequeath it as an heirloom." Designed for sitting in while drinking Scotch, it's suitably called The Glenlivet Chair. We'll drink to that. The Glenlivet, the single malt that started it all, salutes Arthur Edelman, a fellow Originator.

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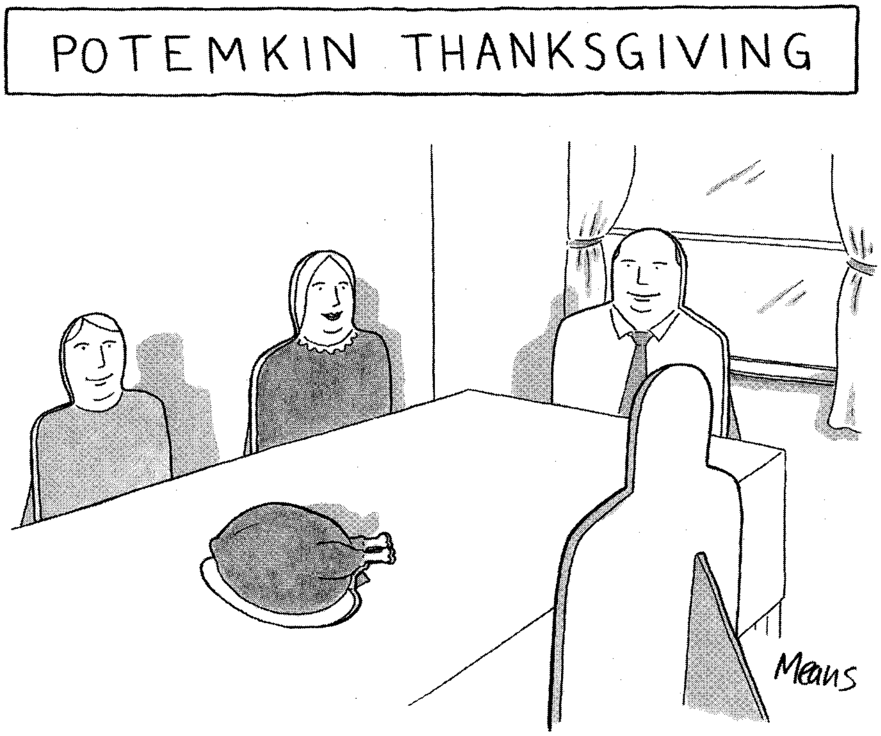

stroy Iran's nuclear network, there are many who think that thirty-six hours of bombing is the only way to remind the Iranians of the very high cost of going forward with the bomb—and of supporting Moqtada al-Sadr and his pro-Iran element in Iraq." (Sadr, who commands a Shiite militia, has religious ties to Iran.)

In the current issue of *Foreign Policy*, Joshua Muravchik, a prominent neoconservative, argued that the Administration had little choice. "Make no mistake: President Bush will need to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities before leaving office," he wrote. The President would be bitterly criticized for a preëmptive attack on Iran, Muravchik said, and so neoconservatives "need to pave the way intellectually now and be prepared to defend the action when it comes."

The main Middle East expert on the Vice-President's staff is David Wurmser, a neoconservative who was a strident advocate for the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Like many in Washington, Wurmser "believes that, so far, there's been no price tag on Iran for its nuclear efforts and for its continuing agitation and intervention inside Iraq," the consultant said. But, unlike those in the Administration who are calling for limited strikes, Wurmser and others in Cheney's office "want to end the regime," the consultant said. "They argue that there can be no settlement of the Iraq war without regime change in Iran."

The Administration's planning for a military attack on Iran was made far more complicated earlier this fall by a highly classified draft assessment by the C.I.A. challenging the White House's assumptions about how close Iran might be to building a nuclear bomb. The C.I.A. found no conclusive evidence, as yet, of a secret Iranian nuclear-weapons program running parallel to the civilian operations that Iran has declared to the International Atomic Energy Agency. (The C.I.A. declined to comment on this story.)

The C.I.A.'s analysis, which has been circulated to other agencies for comment, was based on technical intelligence collected by overhead satellites, and on other empirical evidence, such as measurements of the radioactivity of water samples and smoke plumes from factories and power plants. Additional data have been gathered, intelligence sources told me, by high-tech (and highly classified) radioactivity-detection devices that clandestine American and Israeli agents placed near suspected nuclear-weapons facilities inside Iran in the past year or so. No significant amounts of radioactivity were found.

A current senior intelligence official

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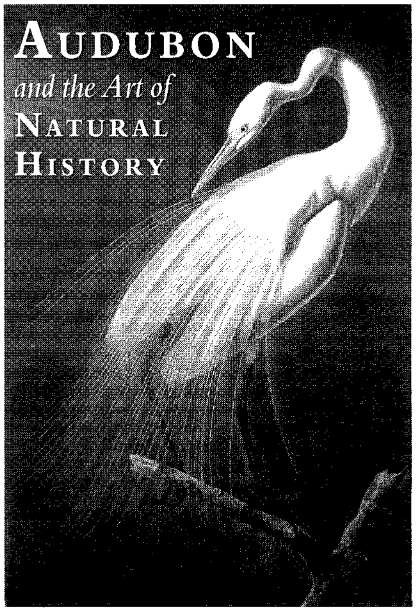

Plate 18.30, *Great Egret*, John J. Audubon
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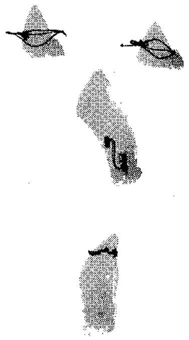
confirmed the existence of the C.I.A. analysis, and told me that the White House had been hostile to it. The White House’s dismissal of the C.I.A. findings on Iran is widely known in the intelligence community. Cheney and his aides discounted the assessment, the former senior intelligence official said. “They’re not looking for a smoking gun,” the official added, referring to specific intelligence about Iranian nuclear planning. “They’re looking for the degree of comfort level they think they need to accomplish the mission.” The Pentagon’s Defense Intelligence Agency also challenged the C.I.A.’s analysis. “The D.I.A. is fighting the agency’s conclusions, and disputing its approach,” the former senior intelligence official said. Bush and Cheney, he added, can try to prevent the C.I.A. assessment from being incorporated into a forthcoming National Intelligence Estimate on Iranian nuclear capabilities, “but they can’t stop the agency from putting it out for comment inside the intelligence community.” The C.I.A. assessment warned the White House that it would be a mistake to conclude that the failure to find a secret nuclear-weapons program in Iran merely meant that the Iranians had done a good job of hiding it. The former senior intelligence official noted that at the height of the Cold War the Soviets were equally skilled at deception and misdirection, yet the American intelligence community was readily able to unravel the details of their long-range-missile and nuclear-weapons programs. But some in the White House, including in Cheney’s office, had made just such an assumption—that “the lack of evidence means they must have it,” the former official said.



Iran is a signatory to the non-proliferation treaty, under which it is entitled to conduct nuclear research for peaceful purposes. Despite the offer of trade agreements and the prospect of military action, it defied a demand by the I.A.E.A. and the Security Council, earlier this year, that it stop enriching uranium—a process that can produce material for nuclear power plants as well as for weapons—and it has been unable, or unwilling, to account for traces of plutonium and highly enriched uranium that have been detected during I.A.E.A. inspections. The I.A.E.A. has complained about a lack of “transparency,” although, like the C.I.A., it has not found unambiguous evidence of a secret weapons program.

Last week, Iran’s President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, announced that Iran had made further progress in its enrichment research program, and said, “We know that some countries may not be pleased.” He insisted that Iran was abiding by international agreements, but said, “Time is now completely on the side of the Iranian people.” A diplomat in Vienna, where the I.A.E.A. has its headquarters, told me that the agency was skeptical of the claim, for technical reasons. But Ahmadinejad’s defiant tone did nothing to diminish suspicions about Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

“There is no evidence of a large-scale covert enrichment program inside Iran,” one involved European diplomat said. “But the Iranians would not have launched themselves into a very dangerous confrontation with the West on the basis of a weapons program that they no longer pursue. Their enrichment program makes sense only in terms of wanting nuclear weapons. It would be inconceivable if they weren’t cheating to some degree. You don’t need a covert program to be concerned about Iran’s nuclear ambitions. We have enough information to be concerned without one. It’s not a slam dunk, but it’s close to it.”

There are, however, other possible reasons for Iran’s obstinacy. The nuclear program—peaceful or not—is a source of great national pride, and President Ahmadinejad’s support for it has helped to propel him to enormous popularity. (Saddam Hussein created confusion for years, inside and outside his country, about whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, in part to project an image of strength.) According to the former senior intelligence official, the C.I.A.’s assessment suggested that Iran might even see some benefits in a limited military strike—especially one that did not succeed in fully destroying its nuclear program—in that an attack might enhance its position in the Islamic world. “They learned that in the Iraqi experience, and relearned it in southern Lebanon,” the former senior official said. In both cases, a more powerful military force had trouble achieving its military or political goals; in Lebanon, Israel’s war against Hezbollah did not destroy the group’s entire arsenal of rockets, and increased the popularity of its leader, Hassan Nasrallah.

The former senior intelligence official added that the C.I.A. assessment raised the possibility that an American attack on Iran could end up serving as a rallying point to unite Sunni and Shiite populations. “An American attack will paper over any differences in the Arab world, and we’ll have Syrians, Iranians, Hamas, and Hezbollah fighting against us—and the Saudis and the Egyptians questioning their ties to the West. It’s an analyst’s worst nightmare—for the first time since the caliphate there will be common cause in the Middle East.” (An Islamic caliphate ruled the Middle East for over six hundred years, until the thirteenth century.)

According to the Pentagon consultant, “The C.I.A.’s view is that, without more intelligence, a large-scale bombing attack would not stop Iran’s nuclear program. And a low-end campaign of subversion and sabotage would play into Iran’s hands—bolstering support for the religious leadership and deepening anti-American Muslim rage.”

The Pentagon consultant said that he and many of his colleagues in the military believe that Iran is intent on developing nuclear-weapons capability. But he added that the Bush Administration’s options for dealing with that threat are diminished, because of a lack of good intelligence and also because “we’ve cried wolf” before.

As the C.I.A.’s assessment was making its way through the government, late this summer, current and former military officers and consultants told me, a new element suddenly emerged: intelligence from Israeli spies operating inside Iran claimed that Iran has developed and tested a trigger device for a nuclear bomb. The provenance and significance of the human intelligence, or HUMINT, are controversial. “The problem is that no one can verify it,” the former senior intelligence official told me. “We don’t know who the Israeli source is. The briefing says the Iranians are testing trigger mechanisms"—simulating a zero-yield nuclear explosion without any weapons-grade materials—"but there are no diagrams, no significant facts. Where is the test site? How often have they done it? How big is the warhead—a breadbox or a refrigerator? They don't have that." And yet, he said, the report was being used by White House hawks within the Administration to "prove the White House's theory that the Iranians are on track. And tests leave no radioactive track, which is why we can't find it." Still, he said, "The agency is standing its ground."

The Pentagon consultant, however, told me that he and other intelligence professionals believe that the Israeli intelligence should be taken more seriously. "We live in an era when national technical intelligence"—data from satellites and on-the-ground sensors—"will not get us what we need. HUMINT may not be hard evidence by that standard, but very often it's the best intelligence we can get." He added, with obvious exasperation, that within the intelligence community "we're going to be fighting over the quality of the information for the next year." One reason for the dispute, he said, was that the White House had asked to see the "raw"—the original, unanalyzed and unvetted—Israeli intelligence. Such "stovepiping" of intelligence had led to faulty conclusions about nonexistent weapons of mass destruction during the buildup to the 2003 Iraq war. "Many Presidents in the past have done the same thing," the consultant said, "but intelligence professionals are always aghast when Presidents ask for stuff in the raw. They see it as asking a second grader to read 'Ulysses.' "

HUMINT can be difficult to assess. Some of the most politically significant—and most inaccurate—intelligence about Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction came from an operative, known as Curveball, who was initially supplied to the C.I.A. by German intelligence. But the Pentagon consultant insisted that, in this case, "the Israeli intelligence is apparently very strong." He said that the information about the trigger device had been buttressed by another form of highly classified data, known as MASINT, for "measuring and signature" intelligence. The Defense Intelligence Agency is the central processing and dissemination point for such intelligence, which includes radar, radio, nuclear, and electro-optical data. The consultant said that the MASINT indicated activities that "are not consistent with the programs" Iran has declared to the I.A.E.A. "The intelligence suggests far greater sophistication and more advanced development," the consultant said. "The indications don't make sense, unless they're farther along in some aspects of their nuclear-weapons program than we know."

In early 2004, John Bolton, who was then the Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control (he is now the United Nations Ambassador), privately conveyed to the I.A.E.A. suspicions that

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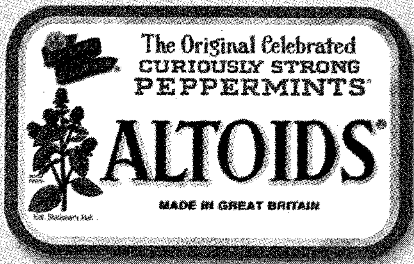
MASTER OF MY DOMINT



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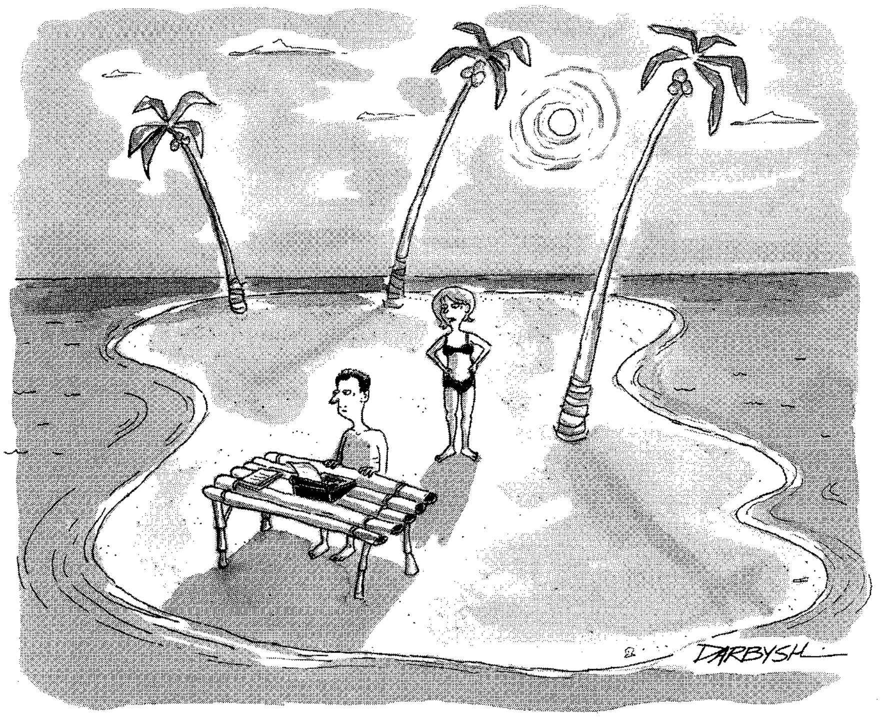
Iran was conducting research into the intricately timed detonation of conventional explosives needed to trigger a nuclear warhead at Parchin, a sensitive facility twenty miles southeast of Tehran that serves as the center of Iran's Defense Industries Organization. A wide array of chemical munitions and fuels, as well as advanced antitank and ground-to-air missiles, are manufactured there, and satellite imagery appeared to show a bunker suitable for testing very large explosions.

A senior diplomat in Vienna told me that, in response to the allegations, I.A.E.A. inspectors went to Parchin in November of 2005, after months of negotiation. An inspection team was allowed to single out a specific site at the base, and then was granted access to a few buildings there. "We found no evidence of nuclear materials," the diplomat said. The inspectors looked hard at an underground explosive-testing pit that, he said, "resembled what South Africa had when it developed its nuclear weapons," three decades ago. The pit could have been used for the kind of kinetic research needed to test a nuclear trigger. But, like so many military facilities with dual-use potential, "it also could be used for other things," such as testing fuel for rockets, which routinely takes place at Parchin. "The Iranians have demonstrated that they can enrich uranium," the diplomat added, "and trigger tests without nuclear yield can be done. But it's a very sophisticated process—it's also known as hydrodynamic testing—and only countries with suitably advanced nuclear testing facilities as well as the necessary scientific expertise can do it. I'd be very skeptical that Iran could do it."

Earlier this month, the allegations about Parchin re-emerged when *Yediot Ahronot*, Israel's largest newspaper, reported that recent satellite imagery showed new "massive construction" at Parchin, suggesting an expansion of underground tunnels and chambers. The newspaper sharply criticized the I.A.E.A.'s inspection process and its director, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, for his insistence on "using very neutral wording for his findings and his conclusions."

Patrick Clawson, an expert on Iran who is the deputy director for research at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a conservative think tank, told me that the "biggest moment" of tension has yet to arrive: "How does the United States keep an Israeli decision point—one that may come sooner than we want—from being reached?" Clawson noted that there is evidence that Iran has been slowed by technical problems in the construction and operation of two small centrifuge cascades, which are essential for the pilot production of enriched uranium. Both are now under I.A.E.A. supervision. "Why were they so slow in getting the second cascade up and running?" Clawson asked. "And why haven't they run the first one as much as they said they would? Do we have more time?



"More rescue efforts, less screenplay."

"Why talk about war?" he said. "We're not talking about going to war with North Korea or Venezuela. It's not necessarily the case that Iran has started a weapons program, and it's conceivable—just conceivable—that Iran does not have a nuclear-weapons program yet. We can slow them down—force them to reinvent the wheel—without bombing, especially if the international conditions get better."

Clawson added that Secretary of State Rice has "staked her reputation on diplomacy, and she will not risk her career without evidence. Her team is saying, 'What's the rush?' The President wants to solve the Iranian issue before leaving office, but he may have to say, 'Darn, I *wish* I could have solved it.' "

Earlier this year, the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert created a task force to coördinate all the available intelligence on Iran. The task force, which is led by Major General Eliezer Shkedi, the head of the Israeli Air Force, reports directly to the Prime Minister. In late October, Olmert appointed Ephraim Sneh, a Labor Party member of the Knesset, to serve as Deputy Defense Minister. Sneh, who served previously in that position under Ehud Barak, has for years insisted that action be taken to prevent Iran from getting the bomb. In an interview this month with the Jerusalem *Post*, Sneh expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of diplomacy or international sanctions in curbing Iran:

> The danger isn't as much Ahmadinejad's deciding to launch an attack but Israel's living under a dark cloud of fear from a leader committed to its destruction. . . . Most Israelis would prefer not to live here; most Jews would prefer not to come here with families, and Israelis who can live abroad will . . . I am afraid Ahmadinejad will be able to kill the Zionist dream without pushing a button. That's why we must prevent this regime from obtaining nuclear capability at all costs.

A similar message was delivered by Benjamin Netanyahu, the Likud leader, in a speech in Los Angeles last week. "It's

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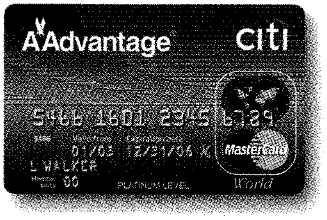

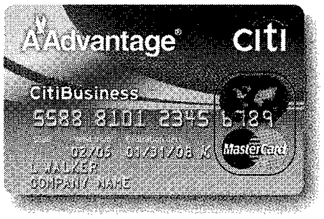

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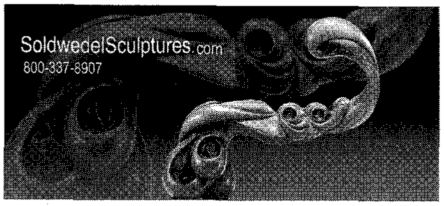
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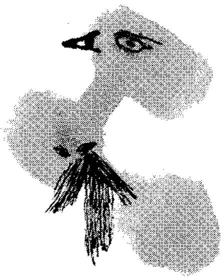
1938 and Iran is Germany. And Iran is racing to arm itself with atomic bombs,” he said, adding that there was “still time” to stop the Iranians.

The Pentagon consultant told me that, while there may be pressure from the Israelis, “they won’t do anything on their own without our green light.” That assurance, he said, “comes from the Cheney shop. It’s Cheney himself who is saying, ‘We’re not going to leave you high and dry, but don’t go without us.’ ” A senior European diplomat agreed: “For Israel, it is a question of life or death. The United States does not want to go into Iran, but, if Israel feels more and more cornered, there may be no other choice.”


Ahnah

A nuclear-armed Iran would not only threaten Israel. It could trigger a strategic-arms race throughout the Middle East, as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt—all led by Sunni governments—would be compelled to take steps to defend themselves. The Bush Administration, if it does take military action against Iran, would have support from Democrats as well as Republicans. Senators Hillary Clinton, of New York, and Evan Bayh, of Indiana, who are potential Democratic Presidential candidates, have warned that Iran cannot be permitted to build a bomb and that—as Clinton said earlier this year—“we cannot take any option off the table.” Howard Dean, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, has also endorsed this view. Last May, Olmert was given a rousing reception when he addressed a joint session of Congress and declared, “A nuclear Iran means a terrorist state could achieve the primary mission for which terrorists live and die—the mass destruction of innocent human life. This challenge, which I believe is the test of our time, is one the West cannot afford to fail.”

Despite such rhetoric, Leslie Gelb, a former State Department official who is a president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, said he believes that, “when push comes to shove, the Israelis will have a hard time selling the idea that an Iranian nuclear capability is imminent. The military and the State Department will be flat against a preëmptive bombing campaign.” Gelb said he hoped that Gates’s appointment would add weight to America’s most pressing issue—“to get some level of Iranian restraint inside Iraq. In the next year or two, we’re much more likely to be negotiating with Iran than bombing it.”

The Bush Administration remains publicly committed to a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear impasse, and has been working with China, Russia, France, Germany, and Britain to get negotiations under way. So far, that effort has foundered; the most recent round of talks broke up early in November, amid growing disagreements with Russia and China about the necessity of imposing harsh United Nations sanctions on the Iranian regime. President Bush is adamant that Iran must stop all of its enrichment programs before any direct talks involving the United States can begin.

The senior European diplomat told me that the French President, Jacques Chirac, and President Bush met in New York on September 19th, as the new U.N. session was beginning, and agreed on what the French called the “Big Bang” approach to breaking the deadlock with Iran. A scenario was presented to Ali Larijani, the chief Iranian negotiator on nuclear issues. The Western delegation would sit down at a negotiating table with Iran. The diplomat told me, “We would say, ‘We’re beginning the negotiations without preconditions,’ and the Iranians would respond, ‘We will suspend.’ Our side would register great satisfaction, and the Iranians would agree to accept I.A.E.A. inspection of their enrichment facilities. And then the West would announce, in return, that they would suspend any U.N. sanctions.” The United States would not be at the table when the talks began but would join later. Larijani took the offer to Tehran; the answer, as relayed by Larijani, was no, the diplomat said. “We were trying to compromise, for all sides, but Ahmadinejad did not want to save face,” the diplomat said. “The beautiful scenario has gone nowhere.”

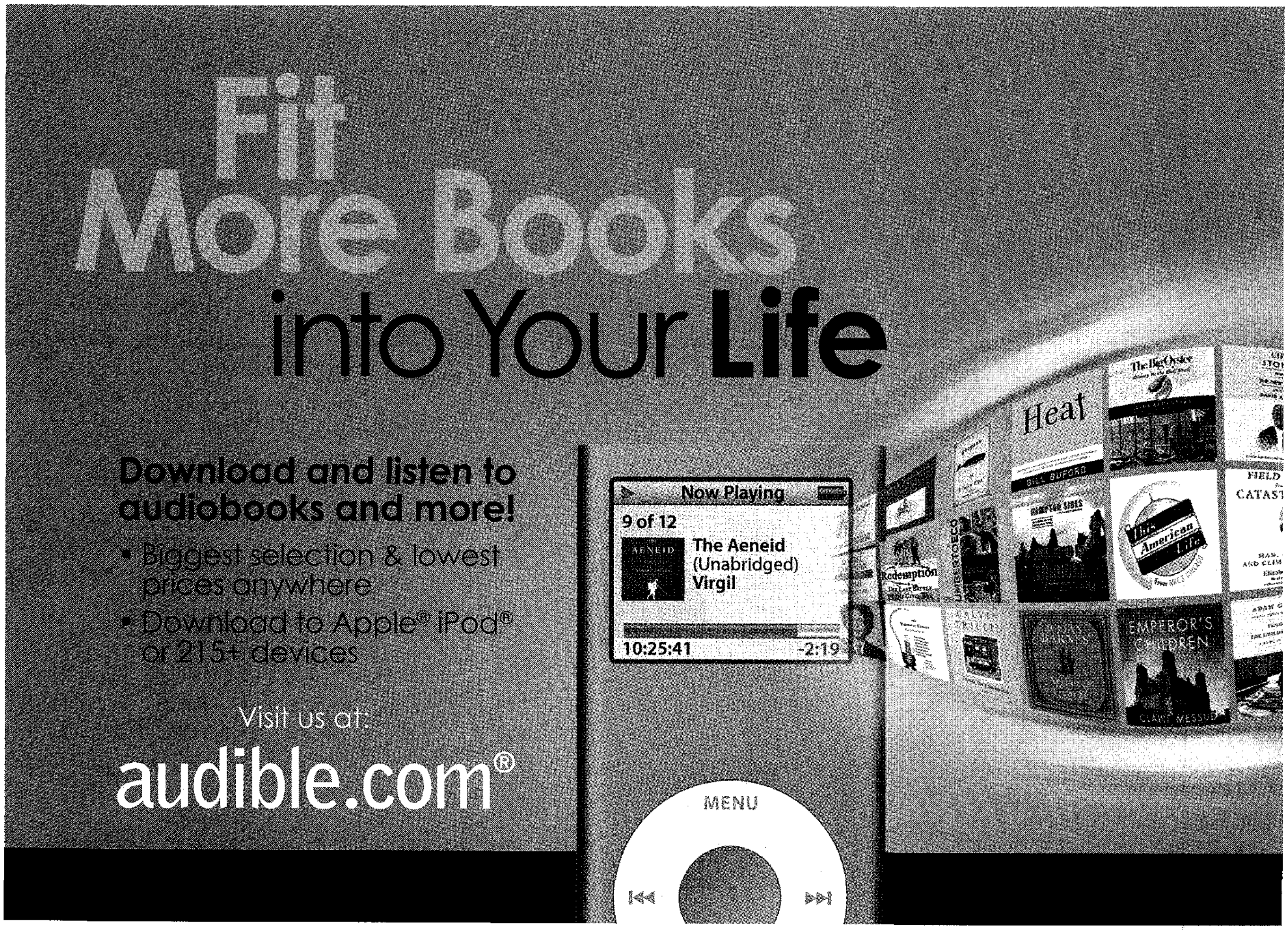
Last week, there was a heightened expectation that the Iraq Study Group would produce a set of recommendations that could win bipartisan approval and guide America out of the quagmire in Iraq. Sources with direct knowledge of the panel's proceedings have told me that the group, as of mid-November, had ruled out calling for an immediate and complete American withdrawal but would recommend focussing on the improved training of Iraqi forces and on redeploying American troops. In the most significant recommendation, Baker and Hamilton were expected to urge President Bush to do what he has thus far refused to do—bring Syria and Iran into a regional conference to help stabilize Iraq.

It is not clear whether the Administration will be receptive. In August, according to the former senior intelligence official, Rumsfeld asked the Joint Chiefs to quietly devise alternative plans for Iraq, to preëmpt new proposals, whether they come from the new Democratic majority or from the Iraq Study Group. "The option of last resort is to move American forces out of the cities and relocate them along the Syrian and Iranian border," the former official said. "Civilians would be hired to train the Iraqi police, with the eventual goal of separating the local police from the Iraqi military. The White House believes that if American troops stay in Iraq long enough—with enough troops—the bad guys will end up killing each other, and Iraqi citizens, fed up with internal strife, will come up with a solution. It'll take a long time to move the troops and train the police. It's a time line to infinity."

In a subsequent interview, the former senior Bush Administration official said that he had also been told that the Pentagon has been at work on a plan in Iraq that called for a military withdrawal from the major urban areas to a series of fortified bases near the borders. The working assumption was that, with the American troops gone from the most heavily populated places, the sectarian violence would "burn out." "The White House is saying it's going to stabilize," the former senior Administration official said, "but it may stabilize the wrong way."

One problem with the proposal that the Administration enlist Iran in reaching a settlement of the conflict in Iraq is that it's not clear that Iran would be interested, especially if the goal is to help the Bush Administration extricate itself from a bad situation.

"Iran is emerging as a dominant power in the Middle East," I was told by a Middle East expert and former senior Administration official. "With a nuclear program, and an ability to interfere throughout the region, it's basically calling the shots. Why should they coöperate with us over Iraq?" He recounted a recent meeting with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who challenged Bush's right to tell Iran that it could not enrich uranium. "Why doesn't America stop enriching uranium?" the Iranian President asked. He laughed, and added, "We'll enrich it for you and sell it to you at a fifty-per-cent discount." ♦



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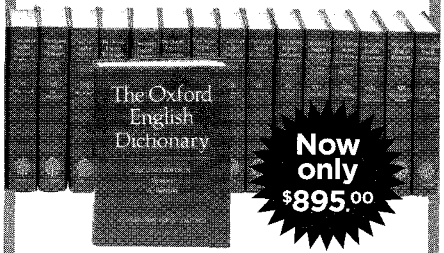

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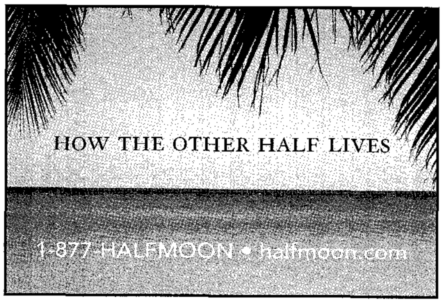

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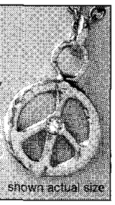

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REFLECTIONS

ROAD TRIPS

The way to someplace new.

BY DAVID SEDARIS

The house I grew up in is located in a subdivision, and when my family first arrived the front yards were, if not completely bare, then at least close to it. It was my father who rallied the neighbors and initiated a campaign to plant maples along the side of the road. Holes were dug, saplings were delivered, and my sisters and I remarked that, with the exception of birds, trees were the only things on earth that weren't cute when they were babies. They looked like branches stuck into the ground, and I remember thinking that by the time they were fully grown I would be old.

And that's pretty much what happened.

Throughout my teens and early twenties, I'd wonder if my father hadn't made a mistake and ordered pygmy maples, if such a thing existed. During my thirties, they grew maybe three feet, tops, but after that their development was astonishing. The last time I saw them, they were actual trees, so tall that the upper branches on the left side of the road mingled with those on the right, forming a solid canopy of shade. This was a few years ago. I was in Raleigh for the night, and my father took me to a party hosted by one of his neighbors. I used to know everyone on our street, but since I'd moved away there had been a lot of turnover. People die, or move into condominiums, and their homes are sold to young married couples who scrap the earth-toned carpets and build islands in the kitchens. The interiors of these houses used to look the same, and, eventually, as each is bought and remodelled, they'll look the same again, but in a different way.

The party was held at what I thought of as "the Rosens' place," though that was two owners ago. The hostess was one of the new people, as were her guests, and it surprised me that my dad knew everyone's name. Here were Phil and Becky, Ashley and Dave, and a rather excitable fifteen-year-old who threw himself upon the sofa with great flourish and referred to my father as a she, as in "Lou Sedaris, who invited *her*?"

"My son is gay!" the boy's mother announced, as if none of us had figured this out yet. He may have attended one of those magnet schools for the arts, but still it floored me that a ninth grader in Raleigh, North Carolina—on the street where I grew up—could comfortably identify himself as a homosexual. I felt like someone in a ten-pound leg brace, meeting a beneficiary of the new polio vaccine. " '*She*' just happens to be my father, young man, and I'd appreciate it if you'd show her a little respect."

"Yes, Ma'am."

When I was this kid's age, you'd be burned alive for such talk. Being a homosexual was unthinkable, and so you denied it, and found a girlfriend who was willing to settle for the sensitive type. On dates, you'd remind her that sex before marriage was just that, sex: what dogs did in the front yard. This as opposed to making love, which was more what you were about. A true union of souls could take anywhere from eight to ten years to properly establish, but you were willing to wait, and for this the mothers loved you. You sometimes discussed it with them over an iced tea, preferably on the back porch when your girlfriend's brother was mowing the lawn with his shirt off.

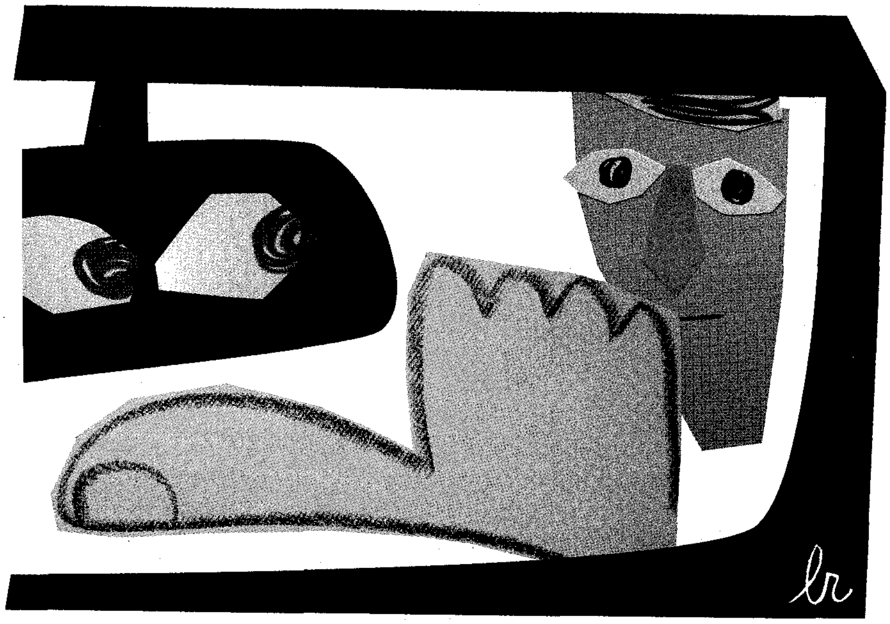
I kept my secret to myself until I was twenty years old, and I might have kept it even longer had a couple not picked me up hitchhiking one night. It was 1 A.M., and the last thing I expected was a ride in a Cadillac. Stranger still was opening the back door and discovering that the people inside were old—my parents' age, at least. The car smelled of hair tonic. A CB radio crackled from its berth beside the steering wheel, and I wondered who they could be talking to at this time of night. Then I noticed that the woman was wearing a negligee. She leaned forward to press the cigarette lighter, and I could see a tag the size of an index card showing through the sheer fabric at the back of her neck. We drove in silence for a mile or two before the man turned in his seat and asked, as if he were inquiring about my health, "How'd you like to eat my wife's pussy?"

Then the woman turned as well, and it was to her that I made my confession: "I'm a homosexual." I'd been waiting to unload this for as long as I could remember, and, amid the screeching of tires and the violent swerve to the side of the road, I felt all the relief I'd imagined I would.

A few months later I said the same thing to my best friend, Ronnie, who pretended to be surprised, and then admitted that she'd known all along. "It's the way you run," she said. "You let your arms flop instead of holding them to your sides."

"Work on your run," I wrote in my diary the following morning.

At the age that many would consider their heyday, I had not had sex with anyone. My confessions did nothing to alter this situation, but, for the first time in my life, I felt that somebody actually knew me. Three somebodies, to be exact. Two were roaming the highway in a Cadillac, doing God knows what with a CB radio, but the other was as close to me as my own skin, and I could now feel the undiluted pleasure of her company.



LAURIE ROSENWALD

Next on my list of people to tell was my former college roommate, Todd. I hitched from Raleigh to Kent, Ohio, but, once I got there, the time didn't seem quite right. It was harder telling a guy than it was telling a girl, and harder still when you'd taken too much acid and were trying to keep the little people from sticking pins in your eyes.

After my failure in Ohio, I headed back south. It was early December, and I had forgotten how cold it could get in this part of the country.

Todd had suggested that I take his down jacket, but I thought it was unsightly, so here I was in a thrift-shop overcoat that didn't even button all the way up. He'd also offered a sweater that belted at the waist. It was thick, and patterned in bright colors, the sort of thing a peasant might wear while herding llamas, but I'd said, "No, it might ruin my silhouette." That was the phrase I had used, and now I was paying for my vanity—because what difference would it have made? "Oh, goodness, I can't give *him* a ride. He looks too lumpy."

I'd left Kent at eight in the morning, and the intervening five hours had taken me less than fifty miles. Now it was lunchtime—not that there was anywhere to buy it, or anything much to buy it with. It began to rain, and, just as I thought of turning back, a tow truck pulled over and the driver motioned for me to get in. He told me that he wasn't going far—just thirty miles up the road—but I was grateful for the warmth and climbed into the passenger seat determined to soak up as much of it as I possibly could.

"So," the man said after I had settled in, "where you from?" I pegged him to be somewhere between old and ancient, mid-forties, maybe, with gray-tinged sideburns shaped like boots.

I told him I was from North Carolina, and he slapped his palm against the steering wheel. "North Carolina. Now, there's a state for you. My brother and me went down on vacation—Topsail Beach, I think it was—and we just had the time of our lives."

When the man turned to address me, I noticed that his ears stuck out, and that his forehead was divided almost in two by a vertical dent that started at the intersection of his eyebrows and ran to within an inch of his hairline. It was the type of thing associated with heavy thought, but this was so deep and painful-looking that it might have been left by a hatchet.

"Yes, sirree, good old North Carolina," the man continued. "N.C., I guess you call it down there."

We discussed the state's climate, and the friendliness of its people, and then he looked into his side-view mirror and monitored the progress of an advancing eighteen-wheeler. "All I know is that if anyone wanted to give me a blow job, or have me give him one—I'd do it."

This came out of nowhere, and what threw me was the way he'd attached it to his previous observation. North Carolina is temperate, and populated with well-meaning people, therefore I will engage in oral sex with another man.

"Well," I said, "they're not *all* friendly. I remember one time I was walking down the street and a group of men grabbed me by the arms and spit in my face." The story was true, and, at its mention, I recalled the stench of their sour, phlegm-clotted saliva. I expected—and reasonably so—that the tow-truck driver might ask for details: "Who were these men? Why did they spit in your face?" But instead he picked up where he'd left off.

"I mean to tell you that I would actually crouch down on this seat and perform fellatio," he said. "Either that or I'd sit up while someone performed it on me—I really would."

"Then, another time," I told him, "another time this guy threatened to

"I'm all for taking away the darts and giving him back his car keys."

knock my teeth down my throat. I was just standing there minding my own business, and, all of a sudden, there he was." This was a lie, or at least the last part was. The man had threatened to knock my teeth down my throat, but only because my friend and I had given him the finger and called him a crusty old redneck. "I was twelve years old at the time," I said. "In Ohio you'd never threaten a kid like that, but down in North Carolina it's par for the course."

Par for the course. Now I was using golf terminology—not that it mattered.

"I mean, why *not* give someone a blow job?" the driver said. "It's just a penis, right? Probably no worse for you than smoking."

Outside the moving truck were flat, barren fields, some bordered by stands of trees and others stretching without interruption out to the horizon. One second they'd appear as a blur, and then the windshield wiper would make its shuddering pass, and everything would come into focus. A station wagon pulled in front of us, and the children in the back seat signalled for my driver to blow his horn. He seemed not to notice them, and just as I thought to bring it to his attention I realized that the request included the word "blow." And so I let it drop, and turned my attention back to the landscape.

Had I been able to address the real subject, I'd have told this man that I was saving myself for the right person. I wanted my first time to be special, meaning that I would know the other guy's name and, I hoped, his telephone number. After sex, we would lie in each other's arms and review the events that had brought us to this point. I could not predict exactly what this conversation would sound like, but I had not imagined that it would include such lines as "I knew this would happen five minutes ago, the moment you climbed into my tow truck." Not that I minded this man's profession. It was the other stuff that bothered me: his dent, his forwardness, and his persistent refusal to turn the goddam page. He sounded like me when I sensed that there were drugs around: "All I know is that if someone wants to get high, or wants to watch while I smoke their dope, I'll do it. I really will."

I cringed to think of myself, skeeving pot off my friends and believing all the while that I was sounding casual. After dropping in uninvited and basically forcing someone to share his drugs, I'd pocket the roach and take my leave, saying, "That's the last time I let you fuck me up like this, I mean it."

"Yes, indeedy," the tow-truck driver said. "A little oral give-and-take would feel pretty good right about now."

I could have ended it so simply. "I don't think my girlfriend would like that too much," I might have said, but I wanted to put that particular lie behind me. There was my life *before* I told a strange woman in a negligee that I was a homosexual, and now there would be my life *after*, two chapters so dissimilar in style and content that they might have been written by different people. That's what I'd hoped, but of course it wouldn't work out that way. I needed a story that I could comfortably live with, and so I compromised, and told the tow-truck driver that I had an ex-girlfriend. "We just broke up a week ago, and now I'm going home to win her back."

"So?" he said. "I got an ex-*wife*. I got a current one, too, but that doesn't mean it wouldn't feel good to give someone a blow job, or to have somebody give you one while you laid back and enjoyed it a little."

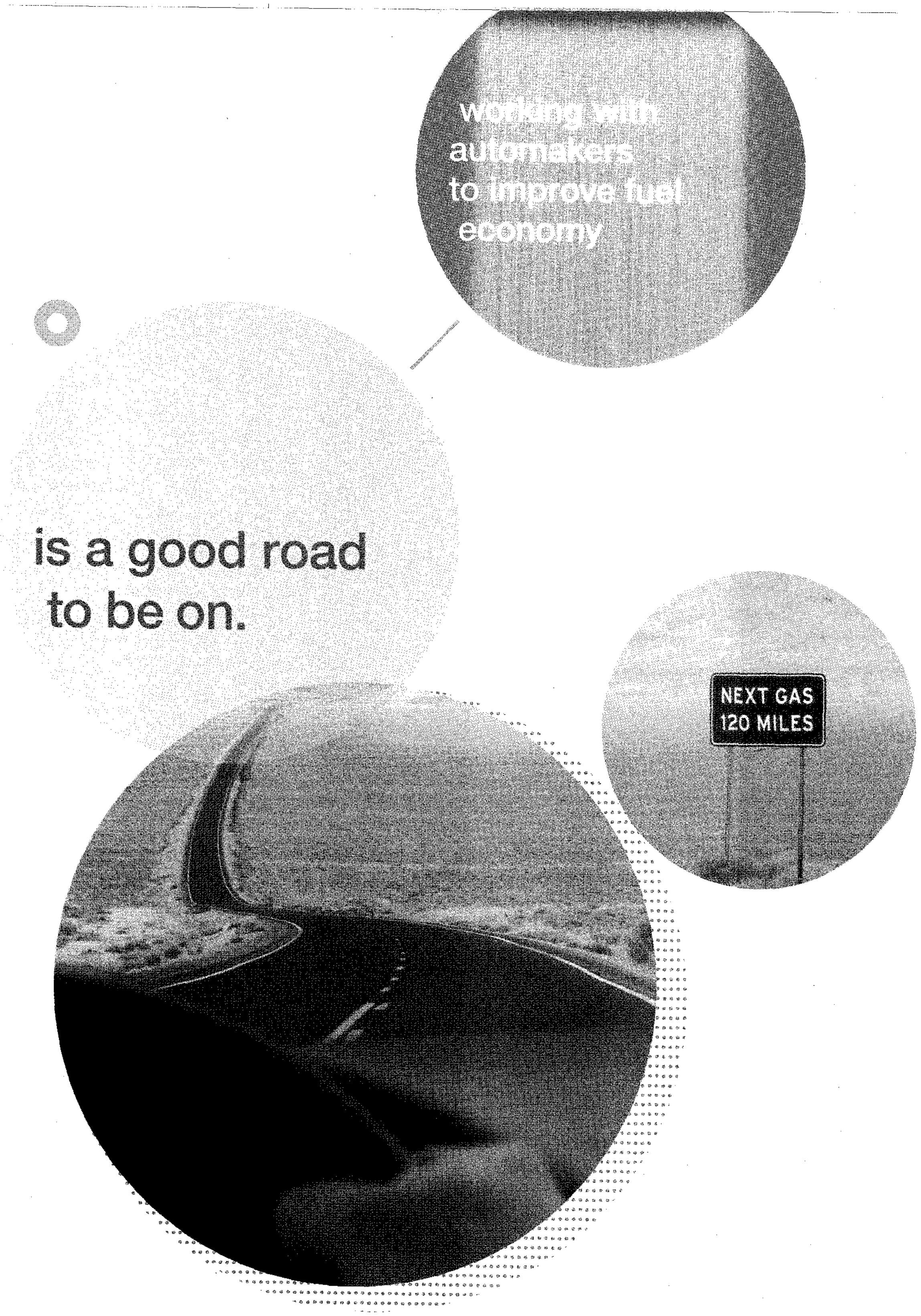
Mine was the lie that got you nowhere, and, as I berated myself for wasting it, the driver took his right hand off the steering wheel and laid it on the seat between us. For a moment it was idle, and then it began to lumber in my direction, its movement as hesitant and blocky as a turtle's. "Yes, sirree," its owner said.

There would come times in later years when I would have sex against my wishes. No one forced me, exactly—it wasn't that. I just wasn't sure how to say, "Go. Get out. I don't want this." Often, I'd feel sorry for the guy: he was deformed through no fault of his own, he bought all his clothes at Sears, he said he loved me on the first date. Once or twice I'd be too scared to say no, but this particular man didn't frighten me. I looked at him in much the same way that the fifteen-year-old, my father's neighbor, must have looked at me: as a relic of an earlier era, when trees were stubs, women could be deceived, and everything inside your home was the color of rust or dirt.

When the shambling hand at last reached my coat, I thought how I'd assert myself and tell the driver that this was an excellent place for me to get out.

"What?" he'd say. "Here? Are you sure?"

The man would pull over, and I would take my place by the side of the road, a virgin with three dollars in his pocket and his whole life ahead of him. ♦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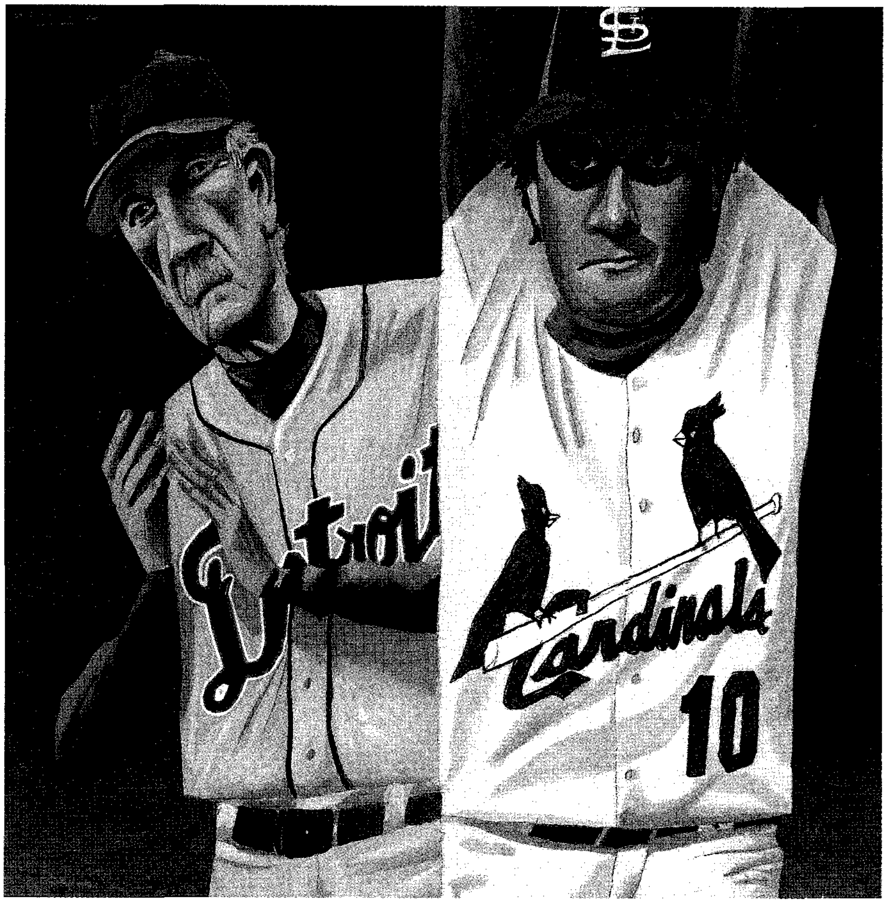
But how about those Mets?

BY ROGER ANGELL



Managers Jim Leyland and Tony La Russa deserved a better Series than this one.

MARK ULRIKSEN

Pity the Tigers. In an autumn when the Taurus died, when thirty-five thousand workers were laid off at G.M., and Ford losses for the third quarter came in at $5.8 billion, here was a famous old Detroit model almost mythically reborn in October as American League pennant-winners and a strong candidate to win the World Series. Nothing of the sort had happened in this town since the Impala. The team, which hadn't posted a winning record in twelve seasons and lost a hundred and nineteen games just three years ago, put up astounding numbers in the first half of the 2006 campaign, running off won-lost streaks of 12-2, 15-1, and 13-1, and by early August stood at forty games over the .500 level. Almost inevitably, there was a late-summer downturn, and the team slid miserably into second place in the Central Division, behind the Twins, on the last day of the season. Not much hope remained, except that the wild-card Tigers (as they now found themselves), after losing to the Yankees in the first game of the playoffs, reversed direction, unexpectedly eliminating the Pinstripes in three straight games and, in the championship round, the Oakland Athletics in four more. With their team in the World Series for the first time since 1984, and paired against another famous pre-expansion club, the St. Louis Cardinals, whom the Tigers had beaten in a seven-game classic in 1968, older local fans could be forgiven if they found a sense of restored American order in these turns of fortune. October names—Kaline and Freehan, Brock and Flood, Kirk Gibson and Bob Gibson—were heard again, and the thrilling heraldry, of course, had never changed: the thick Gothic "D" above the heart on the whiter-than-white home unies, and those perky visiting birds forever roosting on a slanted yellow bat. Forget Honda, forget the local housing slump, the boarded-up stretches of Woodward Avenue, and the closing of Emily's Restaurant—what could be bad, with the World Series back in town?

What was bad, as we now know, was the Tigers, who not only lost this Series in five games but batted a collective .199 in the process and committed eight errors; in four of the games a Tiger pitcher, firing wildly past third base or to first, committed gross comical breaches that allowed an unearned Cardinal run or runs (there were eight in the end) to come pattering home. Botched baseball like this was what you expected at Williamsport. For this watcher, and perhaps for the national audience as well (the TV ratings were the lowest in forty years), the disorders were a fresh reminder of the spareness and elegance that skilled defenses cast unnoticed over most big-league games, imparting a necessary sense of seriousness. This time, you wanted a recall.

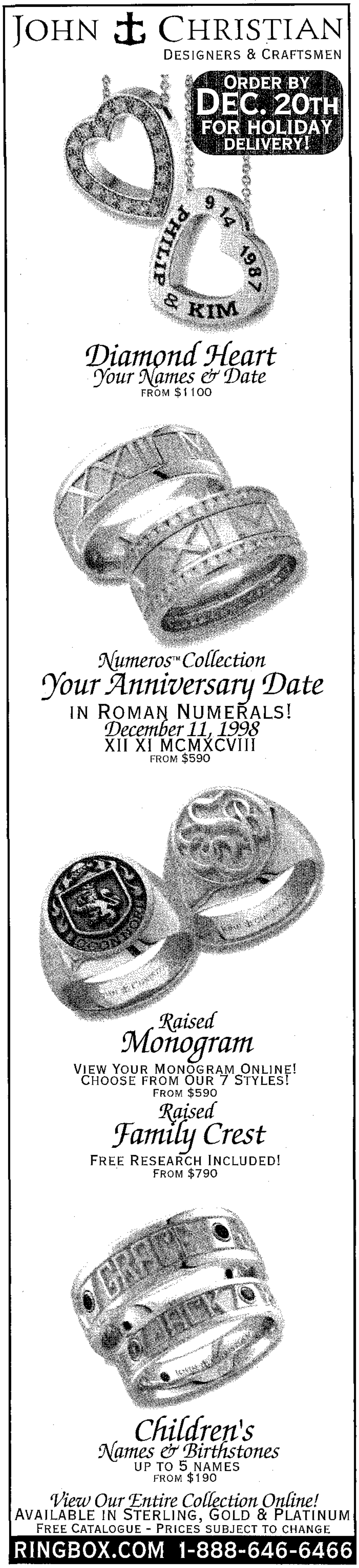
Our mini-tour of the Series begins with the Kenny Rogers blot, a distraction that surfaced in the first inning of Game Two, at the Tigers' Comerica Park, when the Fox TV cameras spotted a glossy brownish smudge on the lower inside thumb area of the Tiger starter's left, or pitching, hand. Could that be pine tar, the announcers speculated, and home detectives who now stole a glance at their own hands could see that the lower thumb is exactly where the fingertips come to rest when the hand is closed. It was a chilly night in Detroit, making it difficult for the pitchers and infielders to get a grab on the ball, but such artificial aids, of course, are outside the law. Here was a looming little scandal, a byplay that also cast doubt on Rogers's unexpected shutout performances in each of his recent post-season starts, and one that might now turn as emotional and tabloidy as Roger Clemens's infamous fling of a broken bat at (well, actually *not* at) Mike Piazza in the 2000 World Series. But the Cardinals' manager, Tony La Russa, would have none of this. When the half-inning ended, word of the Fox sleuthing reached both dugouts, and Rogers, after evidently washing off the stickum, went back out to the mound with clean hands and shut down the Cardinals for the rest of his eight-inning tenure, allowing no runs and two hits. La Russa conferred briefly with the home-plate umpire, Alfonso Marquez, but only to say that he wanted the matter fixed. To the media, later on, La Russa said, “I wouldn’t discuss it. A guy pitches like that, as a team we don’t want to take things away from anybody.”

The next day’s sports call-in shows couldn’t leave it alone, and, citing Rule 8.02(a)(4) of the Official Rules, pointed out that if the ump had paid a visit to the mound at the request of La Russa and found evidence of a substance on Rogers’s hand the only recourse would have been to banish him from the game forthwith and impose an immediate ten-game suspension, effectively disqualifying him from the Series. Now, with the games moved to St. Louis, La Russa was pressed about this untaken opportunity but held his ground. “I have a decision to make,” he said, “and I decided that I was not going to be part of the B.S.”—euphemism his—“where I was going to ask the umpire to go to the mound and undress the pitcher.” He added that he had gone over all this at a Cardinals team meeting, and admitted the possibility that not every one of his players agreed with the course he had chosen.

We have followed this non-event over a distance only to make the point once again that it’s never possible to say for sure whether any move by a manager, however bold or trifling, has led to a certain result on the field—a batter retired, a rally put down, a series won or lost. The mystery remains, but, for me, La Russa, in scorning a tainted gift and instinctively blowing away the innuendo and sports-smirk that surrounds such stuff, told his troops that winning in the end was going to be hard, not easy, and that they were good enough not to need a shortcut to get there.

It takes nothing away from these tough, ecstatic Cardinals to call them unlikely champions. They had contrived to lose ten of their last fourteen games in the regular going, and their final 83-78 won-lost record, though enough to hold first place in a weak division, was topped by a dozen other teams. The Cards’ assets—the incomparable Albert Pujols, the prime offensive force of his generation; the daunting right-hander Chris Carpenter, the incumbent holder of the Cy Young Award; the long-term center-field Gold Glover Jim Edmonds; and the unmatched defensive third baseman Scott Rolen—are genuine blue chips, yet even while attaining the post-season for the sixth time since 2000 these Cards were shadowed by a bitter loss to the Astros in last year’s championship round and their numbed, zombielike performance in a four-game wipeout by the Red Sox in the 2004 World Series. Their chances this time looked frail after in-season losses of the starting pitcher Mark Mulder and the established closer Jason Isringhausen to injuries. Carpenter, as it happened, had to miss the first two Series games while he recovered from his brilliant exertions against the Mets in their next-to-last championship meeting, and attention fell instead on a young replacement, Anthony Reyes, the winner of a grand total of six major-league games, lifetime. Imperturbably chunking the ball inside and out to the confident Tiger hitters, Reyes outpitched the young Detroit fastballer Justin Verlander and came away with a 7–2 win, which, incidentally, snapped an eight-game Cardinals road losing streak in the World Series, stretching back to 1985. Reyes, to be sure, had the advantage of not having to face Pujols, who bombed a third-inning Verlander heater to the deeper distances in right, for two runs. Reyes wears his uniform pants legs at a boyish knee level, revealing the striped scarlet Cardinal stockings that have been scarcely visible since the time of Pepper Martin. His cap, which he pulls down to his eyebrows, in street style, shows no bend or curve to its bill, and imparts a horizontal alertness to his expression, like an Apache scout shading his eyes. The Fox announcers had been putting it out that he starched or ironed his hat, but Reyes dismissed the dorky slur in his post-game: “You know—it comes out of the box flat. I just don’t bend it.”

The next game was the fraught Kenny Rogers meeting, carried off by the Tigers, and by Game Three, in St. Louis, Chris Carpenter and his rested right arm were back on call. Working before the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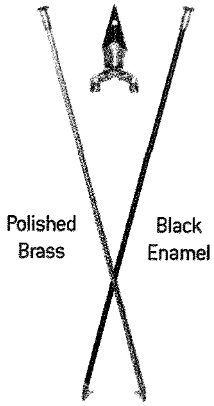

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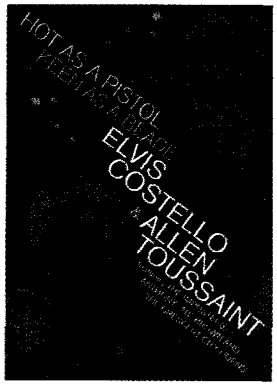

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ravished Busch Stadium multitudes, who dutifully clapped along to the strains of their Budweiser-commercial anthem, he scattered three hits in a 5–0 whitewash and along the way closed down the top six batters in the Tigers lineup for the evening: a stultifying oh-for-twenty, with five strikeouts. Fine pitching, Jim Leyland, the Tigers' skipper, admitted later, glumly adding, "You also have to get some hits now and then off good pitchers. If you don't, you're in trouble." Leyland, an adulated former long-term manager of the Pirates, whom he took three times into the post-season in the nineties but never quite to a world championship, turned the trick at last with an expansion club, the Florida Marlins, in 1997. His efforts with the Tigers this year, his first at the helm in the American League, have made him A.L. Manager of the Year in a landslide. He took on as much blame as he could when his pitchers and infielders now began throwing the ball around in playground fashion, but the perverse or inexplicable turns of the pastime—his center fielder, Curtis Granderson, falling on his face in Game Four while in pursuit of a catchable drive by the Cardinals' David Eckstein, for instance; and, an inning later, his left fielder, Craig Monroe, misplaying another Eckstein poke, which delivered the winning run—could not have taken him wholly by surprise. Leyland, whose Lonesome Dove mustache and parenthesis cheek-seams impart a wary sadness to his gaze, is vividly recalled here within the shadows of the Pirates' dugout on a couple of cold October nights a decade and a half ago while he stood waiting, with a lit Marlboro cupped in his hand. All he wanted for his team was one run—in stretches it was one run for a pennant—which never came, as the Pirates, in a classic and painful seven-gamer against the Atlanta Braves, went scoreless at home across the last eighteen innings and died.

We will revisit some of these same Tigers and Cardinals shortly, magically a fraction younger as they take on the Yankees and the Mets in the earlier October going. A farther cast astern to the season itself brings back (how could it not?) a ninth inning in September at Dodger Stadium, when the home team, down to the Padres by four runs, bopped four successive home runs—by Jeff Kent, J. D. Drew, Russell Martin, and Marlon Anderson—to win a stay into the tenth, when still another Dodger, Nomar Garciaparra, hit a two-run blast to win. The most home runs of the year were the fifty-eight struck by the Phillies' enormous and amiable young first baseman, Ryan Howard, and the most intently watched, surely, the twenty-six that Barry Bonds sent into the seats or into the Bay, propelling him past Babe Ruth's immemorial seven hundred and fourteen, and then some. Bonds, who is forty-one, was still showing the effects of the knee surgeries that had wiped out all but a few games of the previous year for him, and was further burdened by the news of a best-selling book, "Game of Shadows," by the San Francisco sportswriters Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams, which offered passages and witnesses claiming that Bonds had lied when testifying before a grand jury that he had never knowingly used performance-enhancing steroids. Bonds, despite reports that he would imminently be charged with perjury and faced further difficulties with federal income-tax investigators, played on, as yet not officially accused of any crime or misdeed, appearing in a hundred and thirty games. Except when at home, he walked out to the plate for each at-bat under a heavy barrage of boos and taunts, while fans brandished signs daubed with "CHEATER!," "GOT JUICE?," "JUNK BONDS," and the like. His accumulating hate mail was said to be similar to the letters sent to Hank Aaron in 1973, when he first began to threaten the Ruthian milestone. The near-riotous fan stuff, including the occasional syringe flung at his feet, peaked at the time that Barry was closing in on the Babe's mark, which he put away on May 28th, in San Francisco. He now has seven hundred and thirty-four homers in hand and, barring injury, should catch up with Hank Aaron's all-time seven hundred and fifty-five along about next Labor Day, while playing as a designated hitter for some American League team. He has just become a free agent, and the Giants, who may wish to change the subject and also free up the vast clubhouse square footage given over to Bonds's luxury-suite appointments, will not try hard to bring him back. With the Commissioner's new antidrug policy

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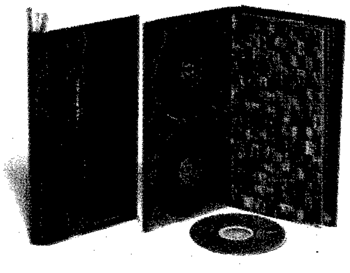

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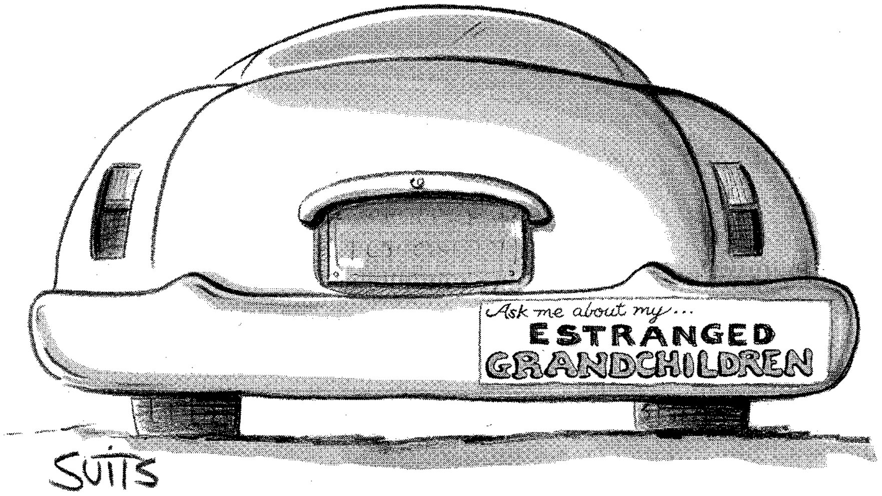
now in operation—it permits unannounced multiple testing of all the players and imposes a fifty-game suspension for a first violation—more fans will have begun to ask themselves what this near-religious fervor has been all about. It's hard for this fan to see that what's been at stake, as is often claimed, is the sanctity of the game, which has never been cited while dozens of new, smaller-field, homer-inducing ballparks were being put up, or when the strike zone or the height of the pitcher's mound was diminished, all in the interest of more dingers, or when a different furtive performance stimulant, ephedrine, was commonly in use. (It was officially banned this year.) It takes an effort to remind myself that home runs are a sidebar of baseball but not its purpose. Once the unlovable Bonds—still perhaps the greatest and most consistent long-range hitter I have ever seen, including Ruth—has done the deed, I trust that, like other habitués of the game, I will be able to find the right place for his record in my baseball consciousness, with whatever asterisks are needed, just the way I did with Roger Maris's sixty-one homers (struck in a longer season than Babe's sixty), and with the jumped-up rabbit-ball averages of the early nineteen-thirties, and even with the rare dead-ball home runs knocked out in the sunlit, bribe-prone, alcoholic, and racist baseball times of my father.

Following baseball in New York this summer was like being in a bar where two enormous and tumultuous conversations were going on side by side. Sometimes, whichever group you belonged with, you'd catch the laughter and excited faces of the strangers in the next bunch and begin to smile and nod, too, even if you didn't know what was going on. If the young Mets crowd had more fun, because all this had started almost from opening day and was so unexpected for them, the Yankees story picked up once they resumed their expected course. They'd passed most of July stuck in second place in their division, a game or two or three behind the Red Sox, and making do without Hideki Matsui and Gary Sheffield, each lengthily sidelined by surgeries to their left wrists. Manager Joe Torre must have sensed at times that he was also making do without Alex Rodriguez, while the celebrity third baseman and presiding American League M.V.P. endured stretches of total helplessness at the plate, waving distantly at pitches without any evident idea of their location or intention, fanning for the second or even the third time in an evening, and walking back to the dugout with his head oddly tilted away from the game and the environs. No one seemed to have a clue about this disconnect, Rodriguez least of all. The fugue affected his fielding and throwing as well, and continued unevenly for most of the season, interrupted by outbursts of ferocious hitting and elongated line-drive home runs. Booing Rodriguez became the common thing at the Stadium, but I always felt it was more about his salary than anything else; there wasn't much malice to it. A-Rod stank, but for private reasons. When the season was done, he'd batted .290, with thirty-five home runs and a hundred and twenty-one R.B.I.s—not bad for a man who on many days was hardly there at all.



Early on, Torre got a nice lift from the rookie outfielder Melky Cabrera, a quick learner who startled himself in June with his first major-league home run, and not long thereafter his first grand slam and, two weeks later, his first walk-off blast. A better-known replacement was Bobby Abreu, an All-Star Phillies slugger miraculously signed aboard at the trade deadline, who took up his place in right field and in the No. 3 batting slot with the ease of a trustee moving up a chair in the boardroom. By early August, when the tall, left-hitting second baseman Robinson Canó came back from a hamstring pull, the Yanks had slipped into first, still close to the now trailing Bostons and then not so close, after they swept five games from the injury-decimated Sox at Fenway Park, scoring forty-nine runs. The batting order, already famous for its salary weight, had taken on a supertanker momentum, built around its poise, lengthy at-bats, and accruing base runners. Abreu, with his late, buttery swings and appraising amusement at pitches a millimetre or two off the strike zone, almost set the tone now. Canó, a .340 batter, waited at the tail end of the order: "Murderers' Row and then Canó," in the words of Jim Leyland, who was telling his young Tiger hitters to try to model themselves a little on the Yankees.

Whenever Mets and Yankees fans got together this year, their divergence came down to the shortstops. Jeter v. Reyes—a classic baseball moot court—was never angry, since neither star could sensibly be disparaged and the talking points were so persuasive. Did range at the position matter most? The advantage had to go to José Reyes. Power? Speed? Reyes again, both times: his seventeen triples and sixty-four stolen bases were tops in his league. The better arm? Probably Reyes, but Jeter was the paragon situational shortstop of his time, making plays that would still be discussed decades later. As Joe Torre put it, "Failure doesn't scare him." Jeter would bat .343 this year (second in the A.L. to the Twins' Joe Mauer, with .347), with two hundred and fourteen hits, and finish high among the leaders in on-base percentage and in the chic new R.I.S.P. stat: batting with runners in scoring po-

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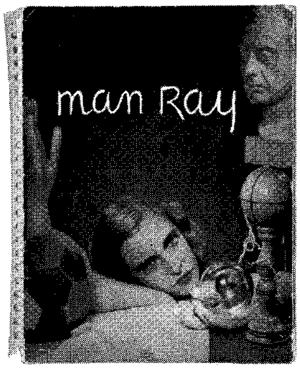
sition. Listening to the arguments, you could see fresh samples burning in the minds of the proponent fans: José, with those sparkly teeth, helmet tipped down over his nose, and pants bottoms that swallowed his shoes, warming you even while he stood in the on-deck circle. Up at the plate now, his bat held high, he cuts at the first or second pitch and rips it on a low line to right-center: a double, let's say. On the next pitch, he whips away to third, safe there by a mile, up and grinning while the Shea hordes leap about and bump fists. Or Jeter working the count, upright in the box and fiddling with his helmet, fouling off a pitch, then another and another, and at last, with his elbow up, hands pulled in, and the bat head arcing, knocking another double to right-center, to deliver a base runner from second and move around the man on first. Jeter, who is thirty-two, played his twelfth season for the Yanks, picking up his two-thousandth hit, lifetime, and, most likely, his first Most Valuable Player award. Reyes, who may rank somewhere behind Carlos Delgado and Carlos Beltrán in Mets-value, lit up the clubhouse every day. It's time to vote: Mantle or Mays? Dionysian or Apollonian?

More than seven million fans watched the Mets and the Yanks at home this year (the Yanks' record 4,247,573 was almost nine hundred thousand the larger), but whenever you went from the Bronx out to Queens you noticed that the ear-splitting sellout games at Shea had a quicker, lighter tone; maybe it came from the way these guys swung the bats. This year, at least, Mets fans didn't have to make allowances for any hardworking, low-talent sweethearts: goodbye, Benny Agbayani. The Mets' success and new aura of extreme confidence is attributable to General Manager Omar Minaya, who in three years on the job has brought aboard the expensive top-liners Pedro Martínez, Carlos Beltrán, and Billy Wagner, the vibrant young catcher Paul Lo Duca, and superstar Carlos Delgado, among others. Minaya is baseball's first Hispanic general manager—a Dominican who actually grew up in Queens. The manager, Willie Randolph, by contrast, is Brooklyn all the way and a graduate of Samuel J. Tilden High. "Mets" is short for "Metropolitans," and what you often heard in the Mets' ebullient clubhouse after a big win was a mixture of Spanish and Reggaetón interspersed with pure New York and a whole lot of laughter. For the fans, as well, there always seemed to be fresh news to fire up the homeward No. 7 subway or to yell about in your bedroom at midnight: Reyes batting for the cycle against the Reds, and knocking a homer from each side of the plate in a game against the Phillies; David Wright's twenty home runs in the first half; the first-place Mets scoring eleven runs in a sixth inning at Wrigley Field that included a slam by Beltrán and then another by Cliff Floyd; Tom Glavine's nine consecutive winning starts and the team's nine straight road wins in June (the elegant Glavine, who is forty-one, has nineteen major-league seasons and two hundred and ninety wins under his belt, which makes it easy to overlook, or even admire, the trim little potbelly that has appeared there: he's a blade with a hernia); the new pitcher, John Maine, throwing twenty-six scoreless mid-season innings (Maine had been a pawn in an off-season, Page Six sort of trade that sent the pitcher Kris Benson and his mouthy celebrity wife, Anna, to Baltimore); the veteran Carlos Delgado, the new first baseman and centerpiece, rapping his four-hundredth lifetime homer—it was another grand salami—against the Cardinals; and, best by far, a three-game July sweep in Atlanta of the Braves, the perennial division bullies and Metsian bugbears, who would be knocked out of the post-season for the first time in fifteen years.

October baseball is stuffed with departures, but there has been nothing of late to equal the sudden failure and expunging of so many proven teams—the Twins, the Padres, the Dodgers, and the Yankees, who together won two games in the divisional round. The Yanks, clear favorites over the Tigers, produced a five-run third inning in their opening 8–4 win at the Stadium (Jeter had five hits for the day) and were ahead again, 3–1, early in the next game when they stopped dead, hitting a wall: twenty straight zeroes on the board and three games and a season gone. Credit the Detroit pitchers—Kenny Rogers threw a shutout seven and two-thirds innings in the third game—or, if you want, blame the manager, as George Steinbrenner



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Undiscovered Treasures

By Amy Ziff, travel reporter and editor-at-large for Travelocity

For many people, the phrase "the Caribbean" evokes a classic picture: luminous turquoise waters, dazzling white sand beaches, and swaying palm trees. Its islands meld into a region of colorful sunsets and umbrella-garnished cocktails. But a growing number of sophisticated travelers are diving deeper to explore the Caribbean's undiscovered treasures and appreciate its distinct cultural identities.

Natural Wonders

With more than seven thousand islands, cays, and reefs, the Caribbean offers a broad range of biodiversity. **The United States Virgin Islands** (USVI) alone has sixty-eight islands to explore, including St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John. Yet you might not know that St. John, the smallest of the three major islands, holds a special treat for nature lovers. Two-thirds of the island belongs to the Virgin Islands National Park, which includes a hiking trail with plantation ruins, petroglyphs, beaches, coves, and more.

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Barbados is famed for its coral reefs and the stunning sunsets on its western coast, where most of the main resorts lie. But if you're lucky—and an early riser—you might get to encounter a troupe of elusive green monkeys there. For a guaranteed monkey sighting, head to **Nevis** and **St. Kitts,** where the resident simians outnumber the people.

The beauty of **Vieques**, off Puerto Rico, was undiscovered by tourists for decades while the U.S. Navy held practice maneuvers there. Now that the military has moved on, you can explore the island and the bioluminescence of Mosquito Bay. Its waters are filled with single-cell lifeforms that glow at the lightest touch. Create a bio-glow angel in the water (similar to a snow angel) and witness this unusual phenomenon firsthand.

Cultural Fusion

Each Caribbean island has a unique history shaped by successive waves of colonization and immigration, and each has evolved into its own distinct fusion of cultures.

In **Jamaica**, the Caribbean's third largest island, you'll find a mix of African, British, and Rastafarian cultures. The French charm of tiny **St. Barths** contributes to its exclusive and tony appeal. The island is sometimes

Passport Reminder

Starting January 8, 2007, U.S. citizens will need a passport to visit all of the Caribbean islands except Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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referred to as the Hamptons of the Caribbean, but it's also adored for its secluded beaches and surf. **Antigua**, the former home of the English Caribbean fleet during the era of Horatio Nelson, still has the world's only Georgian dockyard that's still in use—and it is now open to the public. **Anguilla**, noted for its pure white sands and luxe accommodations, is the epicenter of some the best restaurants in the Caribbean. The islands of **Aruba**, **Bonaire**, and **Curaçao** represent the Dutch portion of the Caribbean. Curaçao's capital city of Willemstad offers a fine example of Dutch architecture and cuisine translated to an island setting.

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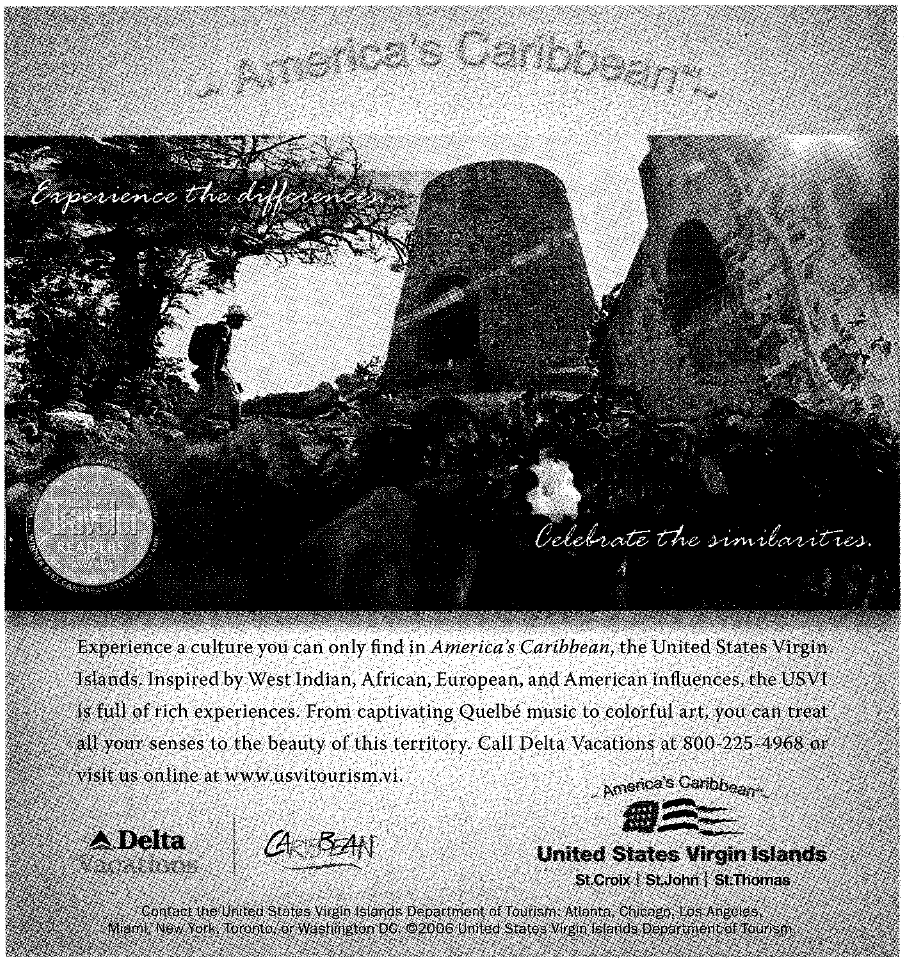

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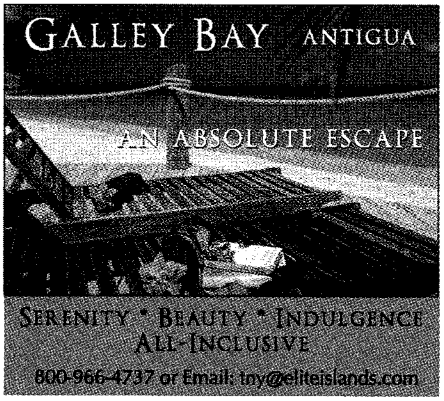

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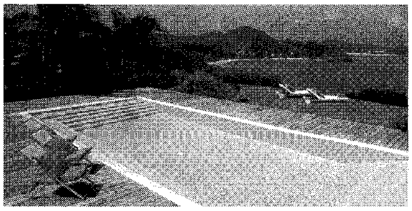

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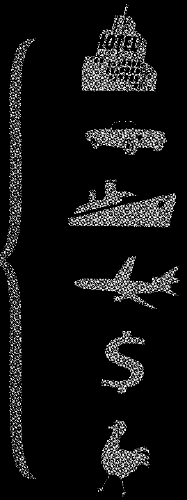

The Guarantee covers all but one of the items pictured to the right.

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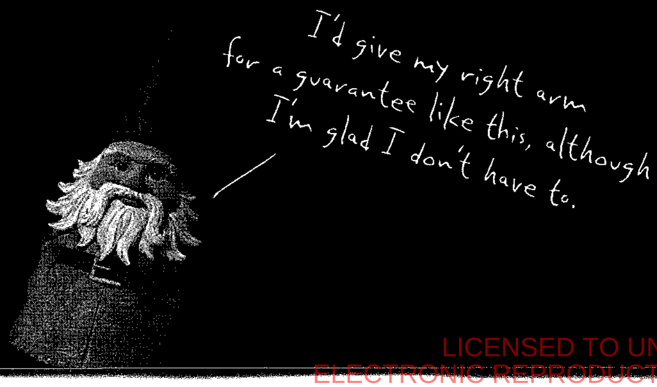
I'd give my right arm for a guarantee like this, although I'm glad I don't have to.

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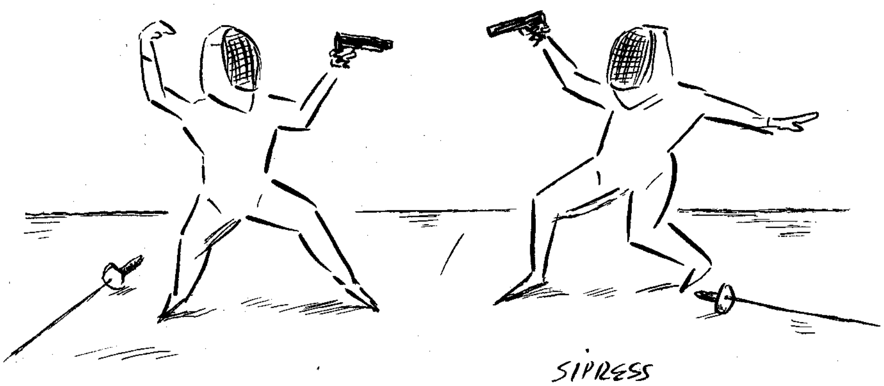


did for a huffy couple of days (cf: "I am deeply disappointed at our being eliminated so early in the playoffs. The result is absolutely not acceptable to me nor to all our great and loyal fans"). Despite the familiar Georgian tones of injured money, Torre was rehired that same week to manage for another season, which will be the last year of his current contract. All this was brushed aside, of course, by news of the tragic accident to Yankee pitcher Cory Lidle, who died when the light plane that he and a flight instructor were flying up the East River crashed into a Seventy-second Street apartment house.

In the divisionals, an injury to Jason Giambi and another A-Rod fadeout, coupled with the late-season return to health of Matsui and then Sheffield, had forced Torre into some awkward tinkerings with his playoff lineup. Jim Leyland almost apologized after the Tigers' 4–3 comeback win in the second game, saying that the late-afternoon light—there had been a rain postponement the previous night—made it tough for the Yankee batters facing his young fireballing relief pitchers. Less charitably, I'd blame Mike Mussina, the gloomy Yankee starter, who gave up a run in each of the fifth, sixth, and seventh innings, and with them the game and, as it turned out, any dreams of another championship.

Irony-starved Yankees supporters and Mets folks who were following all this could ponder the sudden successes of Kenny Rogers and the Cardinals' surprise pitching hero, Jeff Weaver, who had each left behind some memorably ghastly innings while in action for New York teams in recent years. Fans don't forget this stuff. This was the selfsame Weaver, a skinny scarecrow righty, who, while a Yankee, could be counted on for overexcitability on the mound, followed by the sudden sounds of denting timber. Rogers, in image recalled almost more for his spitting than his strikeouts while at work for the Mets, produced the unimaginable in the last game of the 1999 championship series: an eleventh-inning, season-ending, bases-loaded base on balls—the walk-off walk—to the Braves.

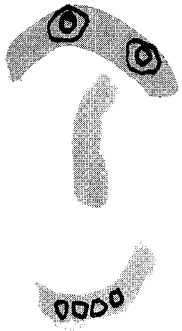
Weaver Redux worked many hard innings for the Cardinals over these October weeks and prevailed, and his dangling right arm and oddly gaping mouth as he peered from the mound for the catcher's signs became a symbol of the squeezing intensity of baseball when the innings dwindle down. He lost to Tom Glavine's four-hit seven innings in the Mets-Cards championship opener and, later on, was the victim in the controversial Rogers World Series game. He hung in, beating the Mets in St. Louis on his next chance, the fifth N.L.C.S. game, and eventually, of all people, emerged as the winning pitcher, over eight triumphant innings, in the Cards' title-clinching 4–2 World Series finale. Weaver had come a distance to this pitcher's dream, having begun the season poorly with the Angels—*worse* than poorly, one might say, since he had been traded away by the team after his record sank to 3-10. The vacancy his departure left in the Angels' roster was filled by his six-years-younger brother, Jered Weaver, called up from the Salt Lake City Bees, in the Pacific Coast League, who thereupon posted an 11-2 record and 2.56 earned-run average as a starter.

Brother Jeff, meanwhile, passed over by every other American League team, was acquired by the Cardinals on July 5th and put in the care of Dave Duncan, the Cards' long-term pitching coach and reclamation specialist. (Duncan is credited for the Lazarus-like rebirth and extended pitching successes of Dave Stewart and Dennis Eckersley, among others, when they came under his care while with the Oakland A's in the nineteen-eighties; he is also the father of Chris Duncan, a rookie Cardinal outfielder/first baseman, who batted .293 this year, with twenty-two home runs.) Pitching coaches never tell you much—"We're working on his arm angle" is about it—but Weaver, better now, produced a middling 5-4 for the remainder of the season and became third in line in the playoff rotation, behind two better Cardinal starters, Jeff Suppan and Chris Carpenter. Suppan, almost untouchable in stretches, was voted M.V.P. of the championship series, but Weaver had the best yarn.

The Cardinals-Mets championship is still close at hand and will carry us through the winter. This was the real deal, the only post-season series to go the full distance this year and, near the end, to seize its players and watching crowds with a constricting anxiety. Games like these rush along, as early highs and highlights get snatched away, almost forgotten a day or an inning later. A Carlos Beltrán homer provided the runs in Glavine's 2–0 shutout win in the home opener, at Shea, but it blends or dims into the celebrations of a three-run first-inning Carlos Delgado shot of Game Two, which in turn are muted or snuffed out by the Cardinals' swift responses at the plate. If there were patterns to these games, they lay in the Mets' struggles to match and patch with their bullpen to make up for an acute shortage of starting pitching—Pedro Martínez, the ace, was out for the year with a bad leg, and Orlando Hernández went down with a torn calf muscle the day before his scheduled playoffs start—and in the Cardinals' tough, reflexive run-scoring, which they demonstrated an amazing eight times in their next at-bats after the Mets had put up some runs. In the third game, to be sure, the Mets never scored at all against Suppan, and on the next night their businesslike four homers (Beltrán, Beltrán, Delgado & Wright) and a six-run sixth carried the day. Other events have been mercifully pushed to one side here: an eleven-pitch at-bat for Pujols that opened the way for a game-tying two-run triple by the scarlet-goateed Scott Spiezio in the second game; an ugly first-inning failure by the starter Steve Trachsel; and the fatal inability of the closer Billy Wagner to close Game Two.

With the Cards up by a game now, fans returning to Shea for perhaps the last baseball of the year had that feeling that not a yell or a foul or a parking-lot moment should be overlooked, and their reception of José Reyes's lead-off, third-pitch home run, struck against Carpenter, was high-end commemorative. There was no Cardinal ricochet this time, but the vast and ceaseless noise at Shea grew a fraction happier after a second run was tacked on in the fourth. Young John Maine gave up an early single but then began scattering strikeouts, five of them in his shutout five and a third innings, before the familiar bullpen parade—Chad Bradford, Guillermo Mota, Aaron Heilman—was summoned. The kid had outpitched Cy Young. The rock and schlock at Shea are the loudest anywhere, but each part of it tonight—Judy Garland, in soft focus on the JumboTron screen, whispering, "There's no place like home"; the Kiss-Cam; the Curly Shuffle (*gnick-gnick-gnick*); the T-shirt bombardment; the "*figlia mia*" Sicilian-wedding thing from "The Godfather"; Peter Finch and his growly "I want you to get up right now and go to the window, open it, and stick your head out and yell" (here come the fans) " 'LET'S GO, METS!' "; and the mass swaying sing-along to Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" (oh-oh-*ohh!*), which has been shamelessly swiped from Fenway Park—carried the perfection of "Die Zauberflöte" and was snuggled and applauded and wept over as never before. Paul Lo Duca knocked one of his short-swing singles to deliver two more runs in the seventh, and though Billy Wagner very nearly gave it away again, it held up—4–2, in the end—and we were tied. Young fans bombing down the ramps roared the José Reyes refrain—"Jo-say! Jo-sayJo-sayJo-say! Jo-say! Jo-say!"—in chorus, and my old Mets-fan friend Peter called me the next day to say, "Transcendent! Sitting with fifty thousand people who agree with you! One mind and one thought! Now I'm way too nervous about tonight. I'm terrified."

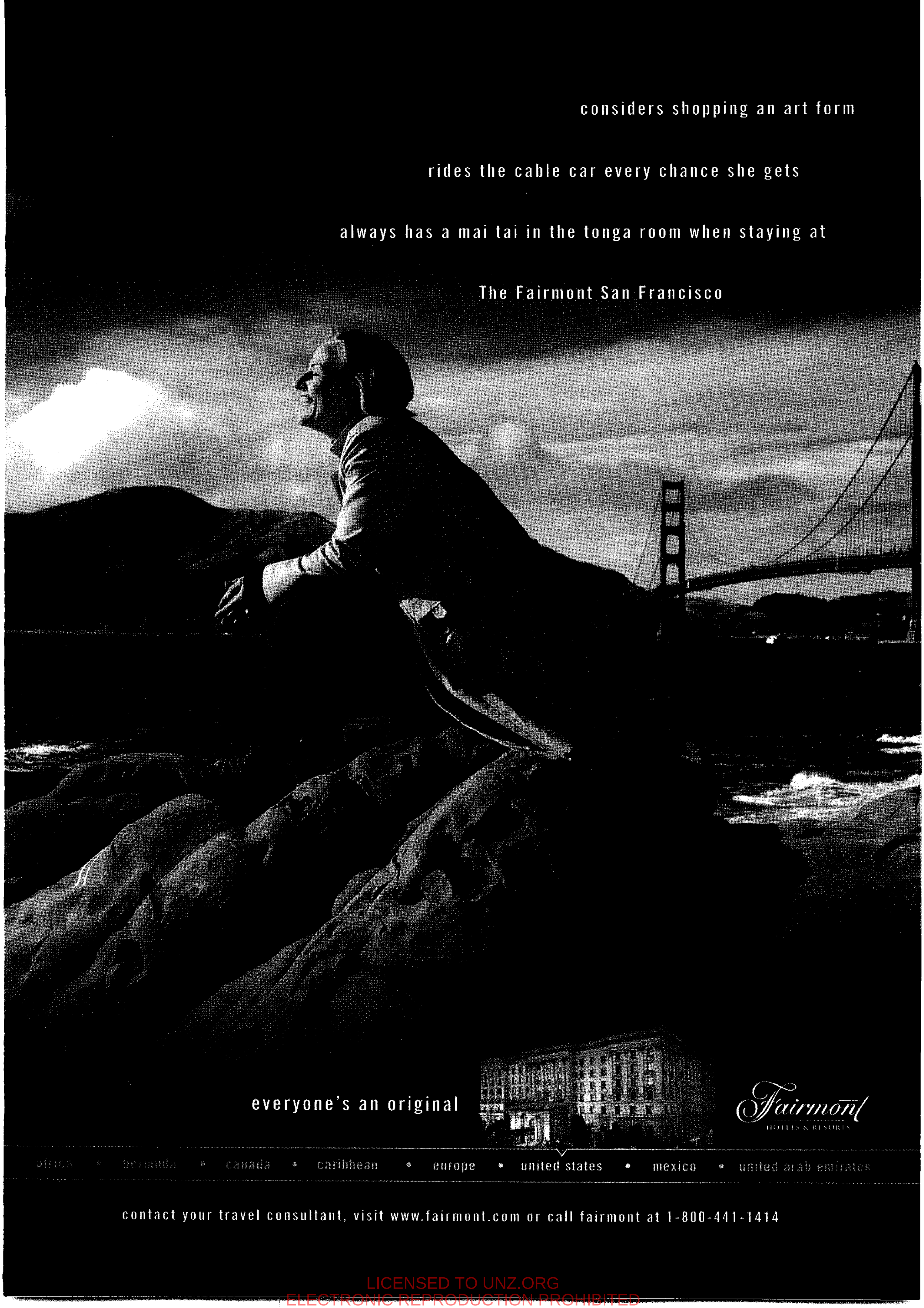
Back again for the finish, the fans at Shea raised homemade signs—"NOT IN THE CARDS TONIGHT," "METS ROCK"—and screeched and waved hankies and sang along again, but with too much on their minds now to find much fun in it. Beltrán's run in the first was swiftly matched in the Cards' next ups, and we rushed along at 1–1, with the semi-anonymous Mets starter Oliver Pérez summoned to keep things together. He had been picked up from the Pirates at the trade deadline only after the reliable Duaner Sánchez injured his shoulder in a late-night taxi accident. (Stay *home*, Duaner! Read a book, watch a DVD!) Pérez, a lefty, threw impressive, darting inside stuff to the Cardinals here, but he was up against the whiskery, obstinate Suppan, whose outs came too quickly, you felt, and without effort. Only when I checked him on the press-box TV monitors could I pick up the thinking behind his work: first-pitch fastball strikes to Reyes, to check his exuberant bat; fastballs in and in to David Wright, to thwart one of his lean-across, wrong-field doubles; breaking stuff to José Valentín; and nothing at all in the strike zone to Delgado, who was walked three times running.



With the game rolling and rushing along now, Jim Edmonds won a walk in the Cardinals' sixth, and Scott Rolen, the next batter, launched a drive to distant left field that was plucked back at the wall—*beyond* the wall—by the Mets left fielder Endy Chávez. The shot was gone, it seemed, and the ascending, astounded yell from the home fans took a moment to accumulate as we saw a dab of white at the very tip of Chávez's glove when he came down, staggering, and checked out the ball, still there, in surprise. Edmonds, convinced like the rest of us that this was a homer, reversed direction but was easily doubled off, to end the inning. In the replays, Chávez's run-up—three or four loping strides and then a short mini-step before the launch—made him look like an Olympic high-jump finalist. His outstretched right arm bends and droops at the apex, and the ball, flashing into view, is picked off like a canapé. A great thing that Endy Chávez is left-handed, everyone suddenly was saying here; with the glove on the other side there's no way that catch is made.

No time for more wondering; the game was drawing down. The Mets blew a chance, with the bases loaded in the sixth. Pérez came out, and then Suppan as well. We were in the ninth now, with the next World Series team not yet in view. Rolen, up again, persistently fouled off good pitches by the latest Mets pitcher, Aaron Heilman, then managed a single to left. Here came the catcher Yadier Molina, no great threat, who knocked a long fly ball that leaned toward the left-field line—you could see the excited Cardinals players, up out of their dugout, leaning, too—stayed up, and stayed fair: a home run, at last, and the runs that would tell the story. The Mets, down 3–1 but with one more at-bat, got lead-off singles from Valentín and Chávez. With one out, José Reyes here banged a mid-deep drive to right-center that came down within the running reach of the center fielder Jim Edmonds. Lo Duca walked, loading the bases and bringing up exactly the right man, Bobby Thomson—no, no, it's Carlos Beltrán, who took a strike, fouled off a curve, then laid off a softly breaking, top-to-bottom changeup breaking ball that dropped within the inner inch or two of the strike zone, untouched and unswung at, for called strike three. Silence. It was raining a bit now, we noticed, and summer seemed over.

I have studied the last pitch—as delivered by the Cards' very tall, right-handed closer Adam Wainwright—in replays and then over my own IF ONLY mental video, and have watched it repeatedly plummet past Beltrán's gaze like a bat in an elevator shaft. Time to go home. Instead, just lately, I've gone back to José Reyes's shot to right center, and now see him catching a fraction more of the ball with his slashing bat, and the ball, this time, taking a course that carries it a yard or two more toward right and lands it there, in for a double. Noises rise, the score is tied, with one out, and Lo Duca is just coming up. ♦



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SHOUTS & MURMURS

JEEVES AND W.

BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

I was lying in bed after a rather depressing night, listening to the birds twitter in the trees, when Jeeves shimmered into the room.

"What ho, Jeeves."

"Good morning, sir."

"What's all this I hear about your heading up some Iraq Study Group? Have you been talking to my father again?"

"Might I suggest the blue suit today? Something about this November suggests blue."

Sometimes Jeeves can be evasive, which is when I apply the old iron hand that we W.s are known for.

"Now, see here, Jeeves, I can handle this Iraq business myself."

"Yes, sir. But, if I may, there does seem to be something of a clamor for an exit strategy."

"Dash it, Jeeves, the only exit strategy is victory."

"Yes, sir. So Dr. Kissinger keeps insisting. And yet, as the Bard would suggest, ripeness is all."

"What are you talking about?"

" 'King Lear,' sir. A play by the late Mr. Shakespeare."

"Just spit it out."

"As you may recall, sir, I had suggested replacing Mr. Rumsfeld before the election, rather than after."

"Deuced good idea, Jeeves. See to it immediately. Walk him up the scaffold, and no blindfold. That'll get us a few votes."

We W.s are slow to anger, but, when the feeling comes, the ground around us trembles.

"If I may, sir?"

"What is it, Jeeves?"

"The election is over."

"Oh. Dash it all, Jeeves, you might have told me."

"I believe there was some mention of it in the newspapers."

"Well, don't be so mysterious. How'd we do? Another unqualified triumph?"

"Not as satisfactorily as one might have hoped, sir. One might even be tempted to say that we took rather a thumping."

"Hmm. Wondered why there've been so many Democrats lurking about. Every time I look up from my desk, they're tiptoeing about with tape measures. It's deuced annoying, Jeeves. How's a President supposed to concentrate?"

"I have spoken with the Secret Service about it, sir. I have asked them to limit Democratic visitors to no more than two per day."

"That Pelosi woman. Sat there like a cobra. Froze my blood, Jeeves. Could hardly get up out of my chair."

"I keenly regret it, sir. I shall ask the Secret Service to be on the lookout especially for her. Meanwhile, perhaps if you appealed to her maternal side? I believe the lady is a mother of five and a grandmother. Perhaps a tasteful arrangement of seasonal flowers, accompanied by an appropriate sentiment? 'Every hyacinth the garden wears/ dropped in her lap from some once lovely head.' "

"What are you going on about now?"

"A poem, sir, by a Mr. Khayyam. A Persian person."

"Well, stop it. You're making my head spin. And that Reid fellow who was with her—good Lord, he could give the Grim Reaper a run for his money. Where do the Democrats find these people, Jeeves? In a funeral parlor?"

"I believe the gentleman is from the state of Nevada, sir. The 'Battle Born' state, as the state flag has it. Admitted to the Union during the Civil War."

"I tried to jolly him up by giving him one of my nicknames. You know how I like to crack the old ice by giving people nicknames."

"I am acquainted with your tendency toward the spontaneous assignment of the fraternal sobriquet. Might I inquire just what you called him?"

"Cactus Butt."

"Doubtless a reference to the flora of his natal environs. And was the future Senate Majority Leader amused, sir, by your jeu d'esprit?"

"He just stared at me. Deuced uncomfortable, let me tell you."

"Perhaps the gentleman is not inclined to persiflage. But, if I may, sir, with respect to Iraq?"

"All right, then. Give it to me straight up."

"Might I suggest, sir, a regional conference?"

"Dash it, Jeeves, we're at war. You can't go conferencing with bullets flying all over the place."

"Indeed, sir. And yet if we were to invite, say, Iran and Syria and some of the other affected countries to sit down for what is, I believe, referred to as 'networking,' it might take some of the pressure off yourself?"

"You mean the sort of how-d'ye-do where everyone sits at one of those huge U-shaped tables and makes endless orations all day?"

"That would be the general notion, yes, sir."

"Now, steady on, Jeeves. You know I hate those things. You sit there with an earphone, listening to interpreters jibber-jabber about how it's all your fault. I'd rather take my chances playing Blinky with Cobra Woman and Cactus Butt."

"You wouldn't actually have to attend personally, sir. Indeed, I could represent you, if that would be agreeable."

"I say, would you, Jeeves?"

"Certainly, sir. Indeed, sir, it is my impression that you have been working much too hard as it is. Might I suggest that you winter at the ranch in Crawford? I believe the climate there this time of year is thought to be salubrious."

"But what if the Vice-President wants to come down and go quail-hunting?"

"I have taken the liberty of speaking with the Secret Service, sir, and have asked that they replace Mr. Cheney's shotgun cartridges with blanks."

"Jeeves, you're a genius. Pack my things. We leave immediately."

"Thank you, sir. I endeavor to give satisfaction." ♦

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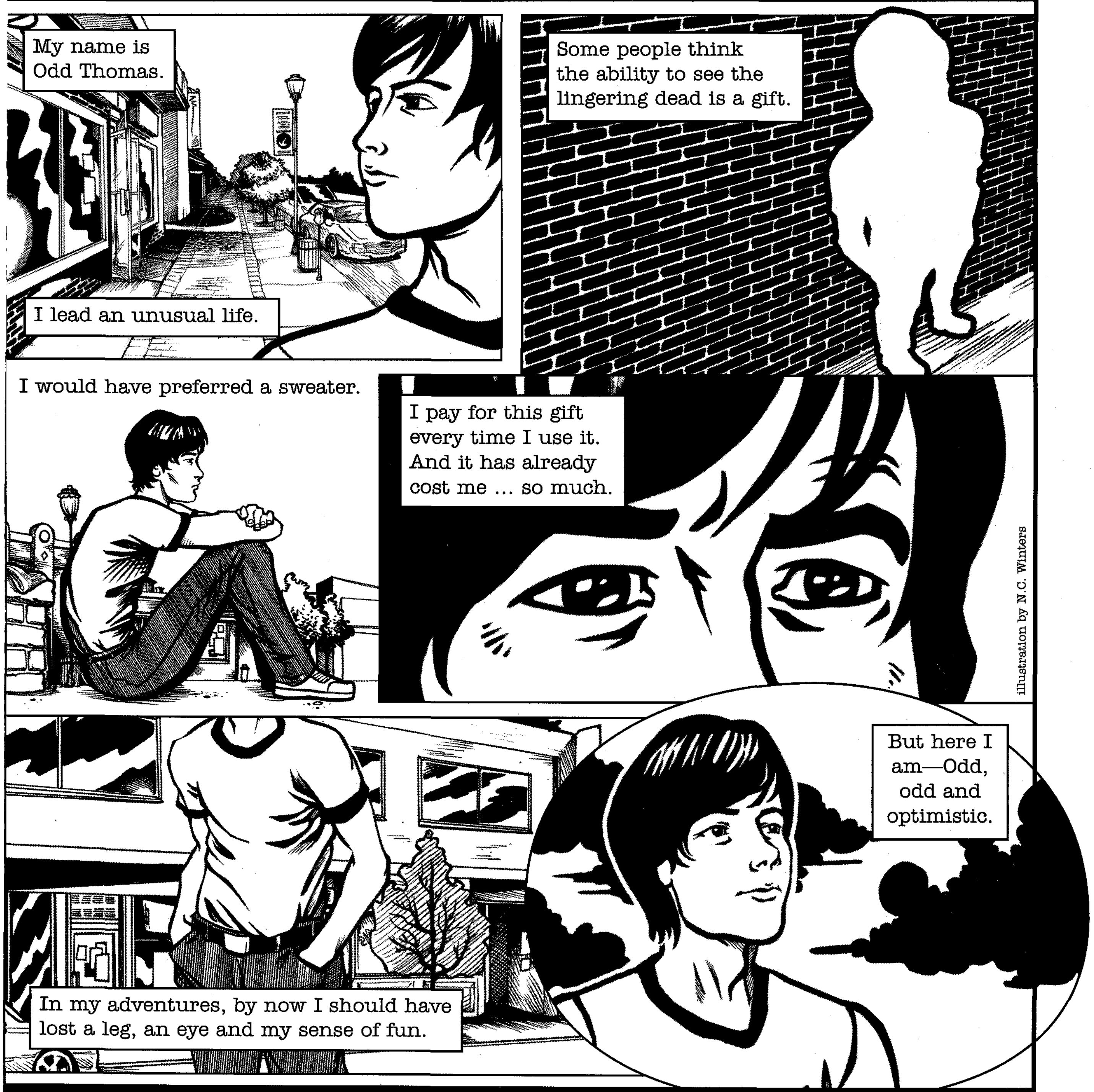
My name is Odd Thomas.
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illustration by N.C. Winters

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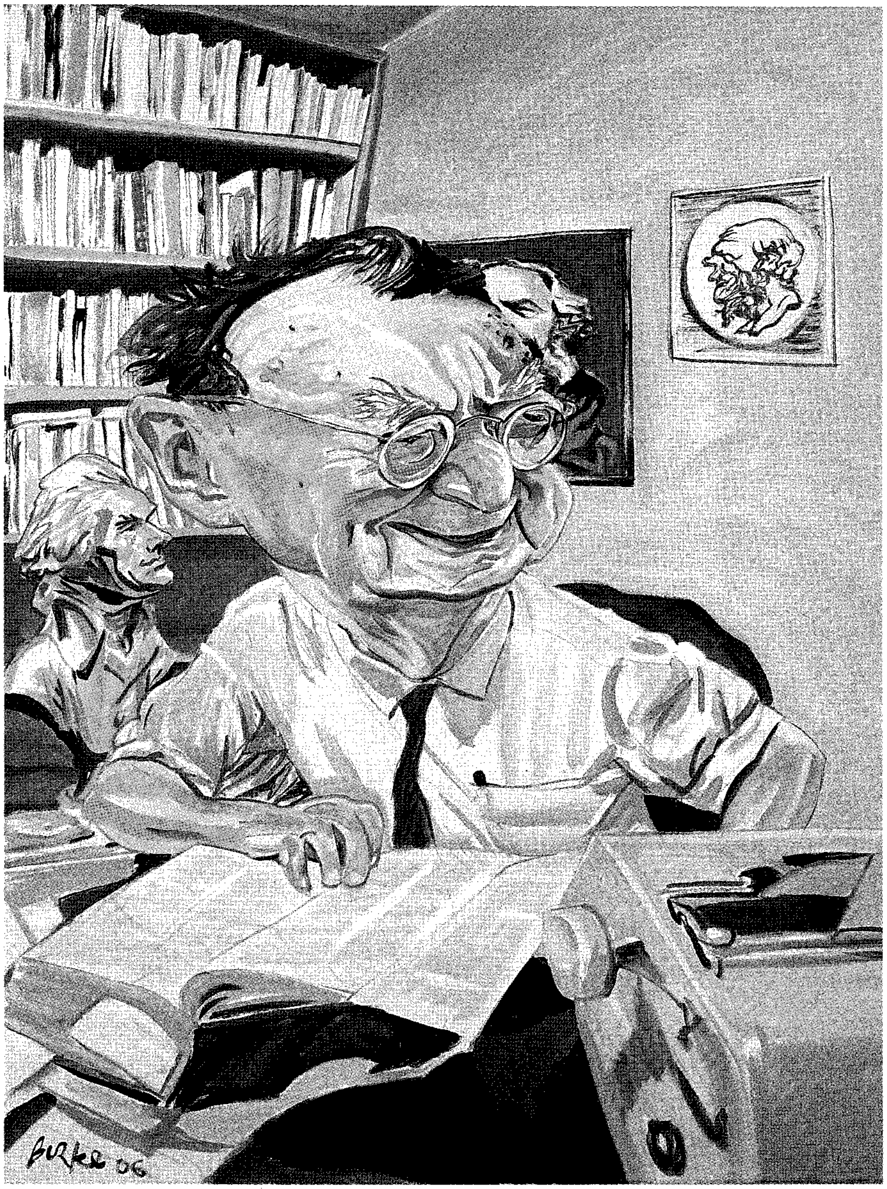
I. F. Stone's problematic crusade.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN



Stone saw his political views, improbably, as a blend of Jefferson and Marx.

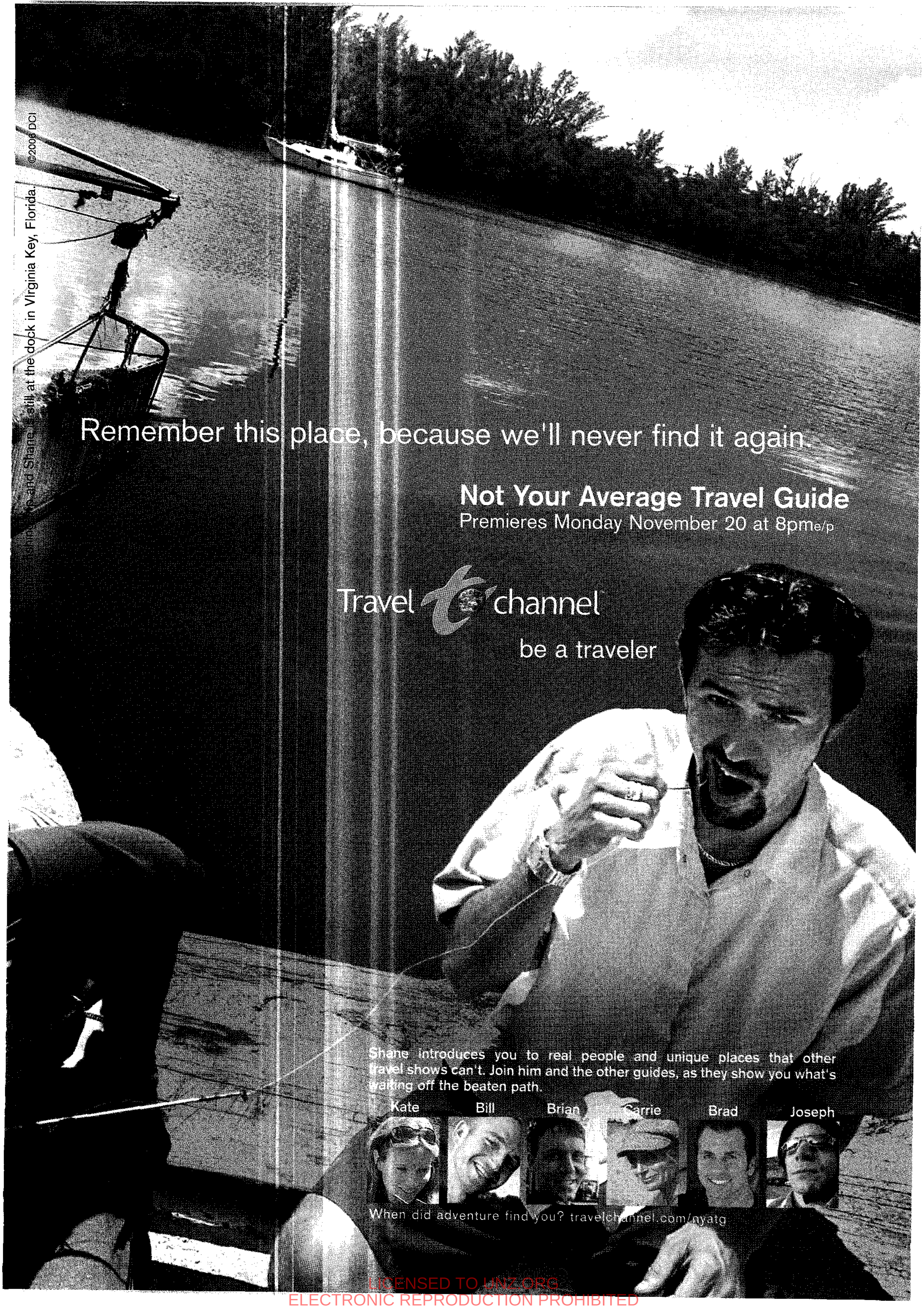
PHILIP BURKE

I. F. Stone, who spent most of his childhood living upstairs from his immigrant parents' drygoods emporium in Haddonfield, New Jersey, devoted most of his middle age to operating a mom-and-pop store of his own: *I. F. Stone's Weekly*, the ardent and combative four-page paper, looking much like an eighteenth-century pamphlet, that he published, with the ceaseless help of his wife, Esther, from the small house where they lived in Washington during the fifties and sixties. In the age of the blogger, it takes some effort to understand why Stone, who for much of the nineteen-year run of the *Weekly* reached an audience not much bigger than twenty thousand, was so important. He has already been the subject of three books, and a fourth, possibly the most ambitious, is a long-in-the-works biography by D. D. Guttenplan, the London correspondent of *The Nation*, which Guttenplan expects to finish later this year. This year brought a biography of Stone by Myra MacPherson, a Washington *Post* reporter for many years, called "All Governments Lie!," and a collection of his own pieces called "The Best of I. F. Stone." And they have set off a hot-blooded new debate about Stone, which is no less intense for his having been dead for seventeen years and for the issues in dispute being more than half a century old.

One way of explaining Stone's lasting power is to offer what is more or less the official catechism: Stone was a courageous independent voice in the conformist Cold War years, who shunned organizational life, stood up for civil liberties, and aggressively questioned the government at a time when the best-known journalists were cheerleaders. He was an impassioned advocate of civil rights long before the great events of the civil-rights movement. He opposed the Vietnam War well before the Gulf of Tonkin incident, in 1964, and was one of the first journalists to question it. This is the argument that Myra MacPherson makes, although she is also a thorough and honest enough reporter to make it clear that Stone had the obsessive self-centeredness that often characterizes crusaders, and that he made at least as many enemies as friends.

But a résumé and a list of positions taken don't capture the extraordinary qualities that have made Stone last. He had a dazzling mind. A small book called "I. F. Stone: A Portrait," by Andrew Patner, published in 1988 (the year before Stone died), which is made up of tape-recorded quotations stitched together with Patner's prose, shows him to have been a conversationalist on the level of Saul Bellow's Von Humboldt Fleisher, with the same knack for mixing raffishness and erudition. Here is a representative passage:

> By the way, did you ever read George Moore's novel "Heloise and Abelard"? It's a wonderful story and it's a beautiful evocation of what life was like in medieval Paris. It is beautiful! Beautiful! Read it some time. But Abelard did a book called "Sic et non"—Yes and no. From deeply respected canonical sources he took contradictory statements


and Shane is still at the dock in Virginia Key, Florida. ©2006 DCI
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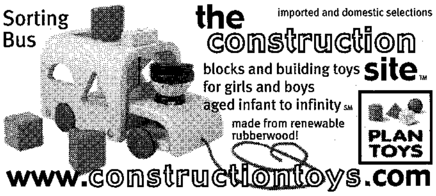

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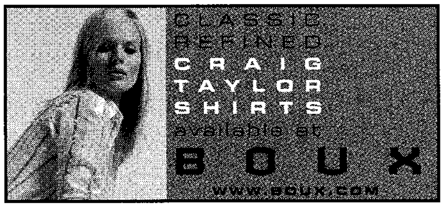

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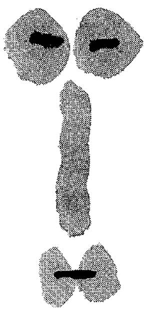
> about the nature of Christ. It was an eye-opener. Now he didn't dare do that with the Holy Writ, the way Spinoza did later in his "Tractatus theologicopoliticus," where he began the critical reading of the Bible. But with the church fathers, Abelard culled out the contradictions and it was the same for Wolfgang Leonhard in this elite school. People say, "Those people in Russia don't know what freedom is, they've never had it, so what do they care." But that's the nature of man: anybody who's a creator, a thinker, an artist, writes to purify his vision and paint it *pure*—not shit. This is the internal dynamics of a society made to break up from within.

Although, MacPherson reports, Stone agonized over his writing, on the page it has the same effortless, almost musical idiomatic flow as his conversation, and also the impressive richness of allusion. Though he never finished college, Stone seemed to have at his command the entirety of the Western tradition. He could make every event look like the expression of a confluence of vast historical forces. He could be funny, though usually through sarcasm, and even as an old man he had a young man's moral passion. The Stone legend has him hardly ever leaving the house, and breaking news by virtue of a super-close reading of the daily newspapers (which he would spread out, tear vertically in half, and arrange in a stack of single pages) and the *Congressional Record* and other agate-type products of the Government Printing Office. But he was an excellent, if unconventional, reporter, who, though severely impaired in both hearing and sight (for years he went around toting a bulky primitive hearing aid with two earpieces and a receiver), had a great journalist's instinct for going where the stories were unfolding and for making a place come to life on the page. Here he is as the news of the D Day invasion reaches Washington:



> The big local event of the day was the President's regular press conference at 4 P.M., which drew a record crowd. Most of the President's official family, from Fala to Judge Rosenman, seemed to be with him in the executive offices, waiting in a kind of holiday mood to watch the old maestro handle the press. The President was happy and confident but tired, and he has aged. His hand shook a little when he lifted it to the same jaunty cigarette holder. He answers questions slowly, looking up at the ceiling, occasionally wriggling his face and scratching his chest between phrases. Our faces must have shown what most of us felt as we came in. For he began, after an extraordinary pause of several minutes in which no questions were asked and we all stood silent, by saying that the correspondents had the same look on their faces that people all over the country must have and that he thought this a very happy conference.

And here he is in Vietnam in 1966:

> The heat lay like a suffocating blanket on the city, and it was hard to know which was worse, the sunny days or the cloudy when a blue haze of carbon monoxide lay low over the teeming streets. At night with the windows open in a cheap hotel which charged New York prices, one slept not just naked but with every pore alert for an occasional hint of breeze. After the midnight curfew one is awakened from time to time by the dull thud of mortars like a giant tapping on distant doors. One night the whole hotel shook, the doors went rat-tat-tat, as a huge armada passed overhead and dumped its deadly freight somewhere far off in the darkness. There were three waves of this miniature earthquake and one suddenly realized the meaning of the term privileged sanctuary, for Americans in Vietnam can sleep with the assurance that amid the heavy traffic overhead, there are no enemy planes. Goliath never had it so good.

MacPherson's mission regarding Stone is to present him as a hero, and to defend him against his legion of critics. She has put a great deal of work into her biography—she says that she began it in 1990—and she provides a full, and evidently reliable, record of his life. What she doesn't do is capture Stone's essence, either as a writer of prose (because she usually quotes him in the form of sentence fragments meant to communicate what position he was taking) or as an intellectual and political actor (because, in her telling, he is always simply opposing injustice). Throughout the book she sets Stone in opposition to Walter Lippmann, who was his rival—even archrival—in real time in Washington, but she presents Lippmann in one dimension, as an establishmentarian and denizen of cozy Georgetown dinner parties, which is true, as far as it goes, but doesn't begin to capture his stature or his complexity. MacPherson is clumsy and obvious in her attempts to set Stone inside one or another historical moment. This is what the Progressive Era was like, according to MacPherson: "The cult of individualism was the ultimate in cynicism, selling 'get ahead at all costs' greed as ideal and accessible to anyone. 'Individualism' sanctified America's financiers and businessmen as generous men who

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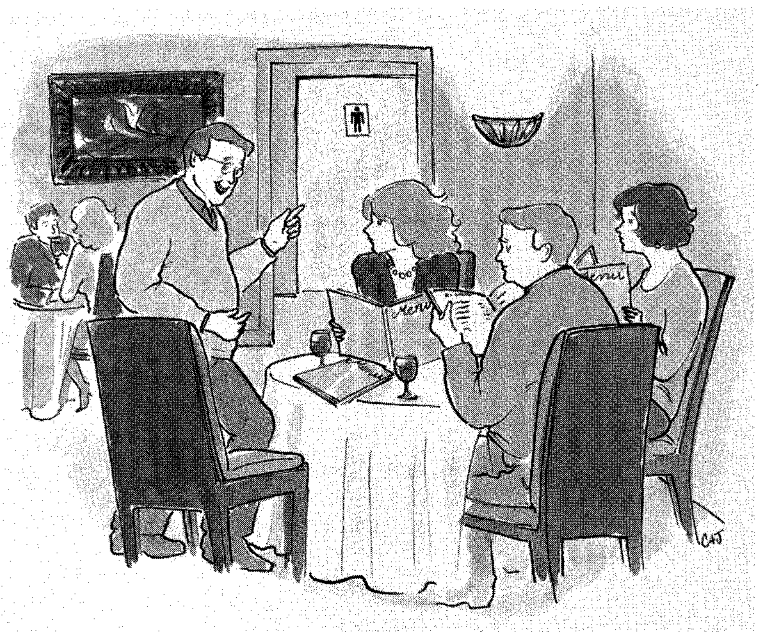
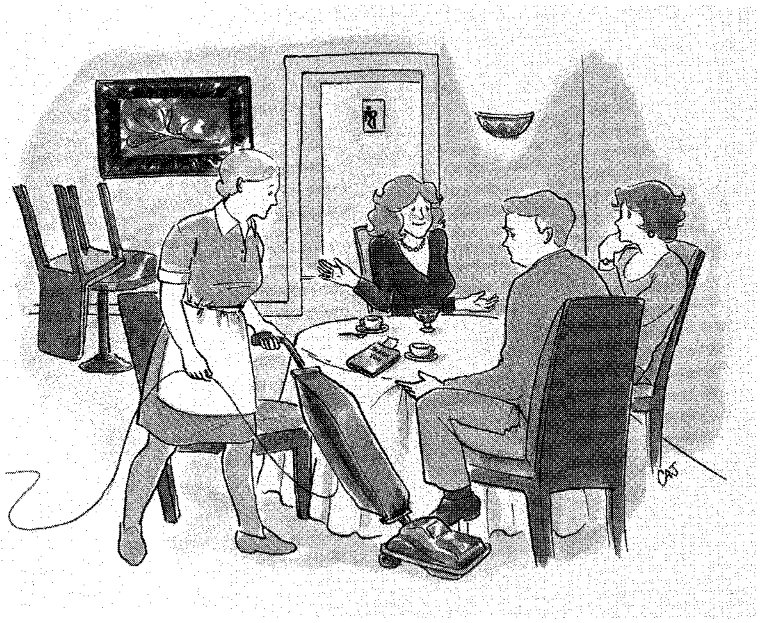


Ron knew 432 ways to say, "I've got to go."



But no excuses for what took him so long.

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Who should NOT take AVODART?

- Women and children should not take AVODART. A woman who is pregnant or capable of becoming pregnant should not handle AVODART capsules. See **"What are the special warnings for women about AVODART?"**
- Do not take AVODART if you have had an allergic reaction to AVODART or any of its ingredients.

What are the special warnings for women about AVODART?

- Women should never take AVODART.
- Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant should not handle AVODART Capsules. If a woman who is pregnant with a male baby gets enough AVODART into her body after swallowing it or through her skin after handling it, the male baby may be born with abnormal sex organs.

What are the special precautions about AVODART?

- Men treated with AVODART should not donate blood until at least 6 months after their final dose to prevent giving AVODART to a pregnant female through a blood transfusion.
- Tell your doctor if you have liver problems. AVODART may not be right for you.

How should I take AVODART?

- Take 1 AVODART capsule once a day.
- Swallow the capsule whole.
- You can take AVODART with or without food.
- If you miss a dose, you may take it later that day. Do not make up the missed dose by taking 2 doses the next day.
- You may find it helpful to take AVODART at the same time every day to help you remember to take your dose.

What are the possible side effects of AVODART?

Possible side effects are impotence (trouble getting or keeping an erection), a decrease in libido (sex drive), enlarged breasts, a decrease in the amount of semen released during sex, and allergic reactions such as rash, itching, hives, and swelling of the lips or face. These events occurred infrequently.

Talk with your doctor if you have questions about these and other side effects that you think may be related to taking AVODART.

How should I store AVODART?

AVODART is a soft gelatin capsule that may become soft and leak or may stick to other capsules if kept at high temperatures. Store AVODART capsules at room temperature of 77°F (25°C) or lower.

If your capsules are cracked or leaking, don't use them, and contact your pharmacist.

General information about AVODART.

- Do not use AVODART for a condition for which it was not prescribed.
- Do not share your AVODART.
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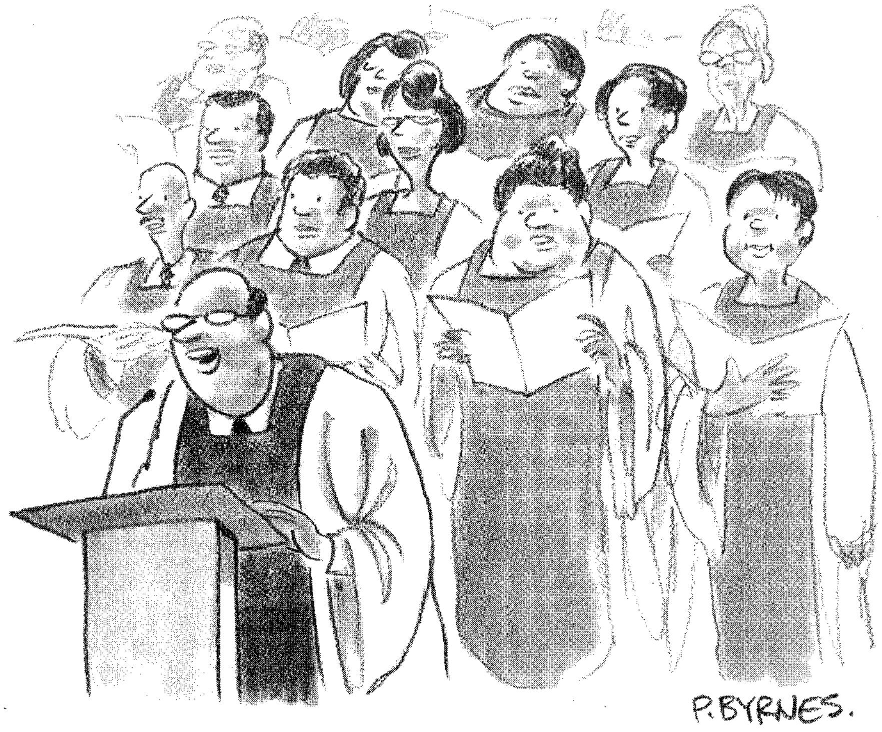

"This is an old, upper-middle-class white spiritual."

• •

made fortunes free from government interference by dint of brains and hard work. This artfully crafted myth ignored corruption, bribery, government deals, and slave wages, which were the norm along the robber barons' path to riches." And here is how she introduces the nineteen-sixties: "Once again, as history unfolded in tragedy, Stone had no desire to retain the remotest sense of neutrality. As the publisher of an opinion journal, Stone continued to lace his observations with hard facts that demolished government lies." This is not prose that communicates what the times were actually like, or even what Stone was like. It communicates that MacPherson and Stone were on the same side.

There is some value in hearing Stone treated in the defensively glorifying way that MacPherson treats him, because it serves as a reminder that, unlike most other journalists at his level of talent and renown, he spent his entire career addressing a left-wing audience, whose frame of reference was roughly what MacPherson's appears to be. That he never went to work for a news organization that was selling itself to its readers as objective was due partly to his natural inclinations, partly to his having been brave enough to start his own paper, and partly to luck. In 1921, when he was thirteen, Stone had a fantastic stroke of good fortune when a liberal heiress named Jill Lit Stern, who had recently moved to Haddonfield from nearby Philadelphia, wandered into his family's store and found him manning the counter, so absorbed in reading Spinoza that she could not get his attention. She became a mentor, providing him with limitless reading material and encouraging him to think of her mansion as a second home. She also introduced him to her husband, J. David Stern, who owned the Camden *Evening Courier,* and who gave Stone, as a fifteen-year-old high-school junior, his first job, as the *Courier's* Haddonfield correspondent. Stone worked for Stern for fifteen years, first in Camden, then at the Philadelphia *Record,* then at the New York *Post,* back in the days when it was a liberal afternoon paper. By the end of the nineteen-thirties, Stone's was a major byline, and he had spent his whole career in that region of the newspaper ecosystem, now vanished, where everyone regarded the *Times* as unpardonably stuffy and conservative.

Stone and Stern finally split in 1939. Stern sold the *Post* to Dorothy Schiff,

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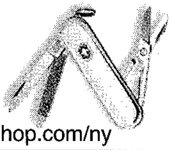

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and Stone moved to Washington with his family. He spent the nineteen-forties working for *PM*, the short-lived, glamorously liberal daily founded by Ralph Ingersoll, and *The Nation*. After *PM* folded, Stone landed at the *Daily Compass*, another battling paper of the left, and after it folded, in 1952, he started *I. F. Stone's Weekly*. In his professional conduct, Stone was always a good petit bourgeois. He proudly operated the *Weekly* in the black almost from the beginning. By the early seventies, its circulation had grown to more than seventy thousand, by virtue of its having become an important voice in the anti-Vietnam War movement. Stone sold the *Weekly's* mailing list, and his own services as a writer, to *The New York Review of Books*, and he ended his run as a publisher, in 1971, as a modestly rich man.

Stone's own view of himself was as a consistently troublemaking voice; most other people, even his friends and admirers, saw him as an ideologue. Neither version is entirely wrong. Inside the left, Stone was often a dissenter, but when he ventured outside the family home, so to speak, he was a defender of the cause.

He was not a Stalinist—if that means having literally written worshipful prose about Joseph Stalin or having tried to deny political participation to those who deviated from the Party line. But almost all of Stone's serious political disputes involved his being more sympathetic to Communism than to whomever he was feuding with. When he fell out with David Stern, Stone was the radical and Stern the liberal. One of his bitterest enmities was toward Richard Rovere, a former colleague from *The Nation*, who was writing the Letter from Washington in *The New Yorker* when Stone was publishing the *Weekly*. Rovere was an ex-Communist who had renounced the Party; Stone had never joined, but neither had he fully renounced it. Stone's life as a journalist coincided almost exactly with the life span of the Soviet Union, and in incident after incident, over many years, Stone's impulse was to take the side of the Soviet Union and its allies. He looks most prophetic now when that turned out to be the right call—as in, for example, the murder of the CBS correspondent George Polk in Greece in 1948, which Stone, unlike most of his colleagues, blamed on the Greek government rather than on the Communists. In many other cases, the same instinct led him to positions that look dubious today. He was initially well disposed toward such dictators as Josip Broz Tito ("He bubbled with enthusiasm about Tito and hoped that he was the face of a new socialism," MacPherson writes), Ho Chi Minh ("a very human man," Stone called him), and Fidel Castro (to Stone, "the most able man in the bloc"). He insisted that the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War were genuine friends of individual liberty. He was evidently unmoved by the eloquent disillusionment of Communists of his generation like George Orwell or Arthur Koestler; for Stone, the god never truly failed. He wrote a justly famous essay that treated the Soviet Union as a fundamentally bad society—but not until 1956, a good two decades after Stalin's show trials, and after Nikita Khrushchev's "secret speech" denouncing the excesses of the Soviet past. He believed that the Cold War was a ruse, dreamed up to distract the American public from what should have been the real issues, as this passage about Harry Truman, from a 1952 book, conveys:

> Behind the truths, half-truths, and fictions which supported the notion that Communism could not be dealt with but must be "contained," there were simpler political realities less unfamiliar to the inexperienced Missouri politician. Instinctively left-of-center, like Roosevelt, Truman had also constantly to struggle with the same kind of abuse. The Fair Deal, like the New Deal, was denounced as "communistic." How better disprove this charge than by active hostility to Moscow? On the other hand, how fight off the Red-scare bogey at home, if one was also open to attack for making an agreement with Moscow? The difficulty of dealing with the Russians was clear enough, but even clearer was the political danger at home.

Rumors that Stone had not only favorable opinions of but affiliations with the Soviet Union dogged him through much of his life, and they had a rebirth with the opening of the Soviet archives. During the Second World War, Soviet agents had contact with an American journalist code-named Blin (Russian for "pancake"), who the F.B.I., which tailed Stone for decades, determined was Stone. In the nineteen-sixties, Stone occasionally had lunch with Oleg Kalugin, an attaché at the Soviet Embassy in Washington, and Kalugin usually paid. Paul Berman, in his review of MacPherson's book in the *Times Book Review*, concluded that Stone's relationship with Kalugin added up to a kind of loose collaboration on Stone's part. That assertion has drawn furious denials from MacPherson and from several of Stone's friends.

MacPherson gets the better of the argument in the narrow sense, but that's only because Berman was reaching for the wrong emblem of the problem.

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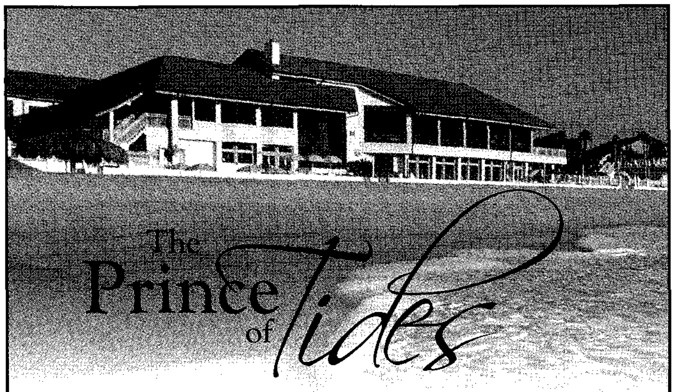

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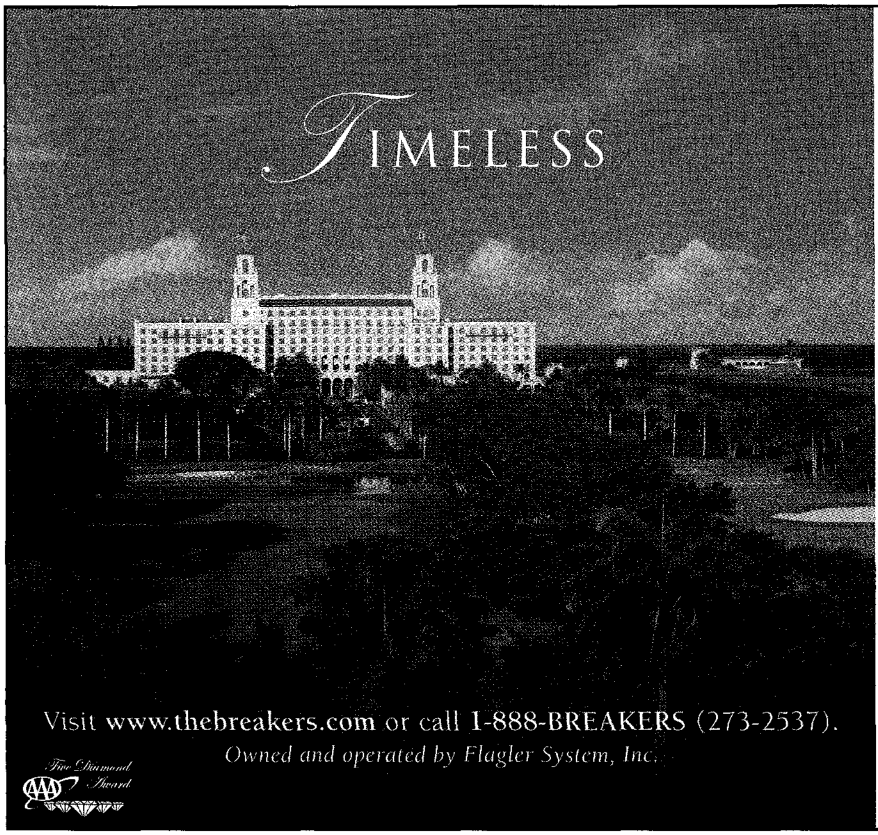

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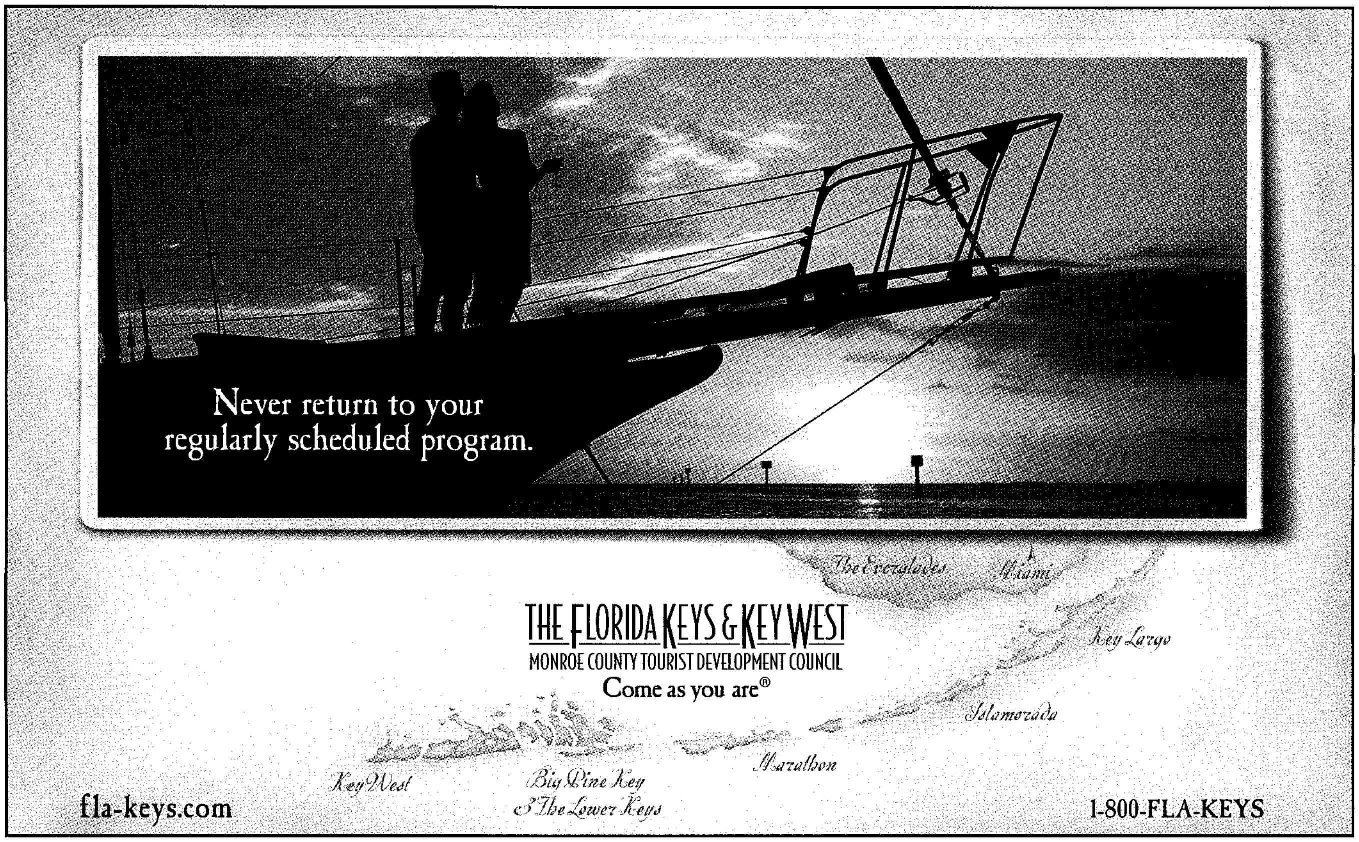
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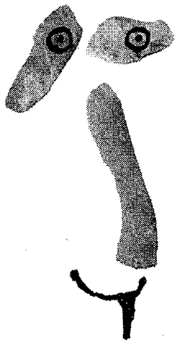
Stone was important as a journalist and intellectual, not as a holder of vital secrets about the operations of the American government. It matters far more what he said about the Soviet Union in print, which is the realm where his historical claim lies, than over lunch at Harvey's restaurant. On the broader question of Stone's view of the Soviet Union, MacPherson offers an odd combination of Stone culpas in specific instances ("While colonialist brutalities paved the way, this does not mitigate—nor should it have prevented Stone from harshly criticizing—mid-twentieth-century Russia") and an over-all plea that we forgive Stone for his view of Soviet Communism. It was gullibility or misplaced idealism or romanticism or myopia, MacPherson and a procession of Stone's friends explain.

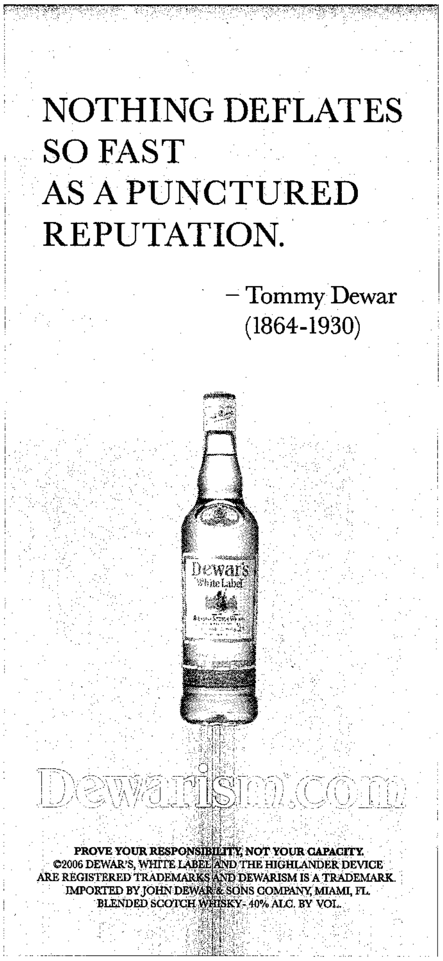


MacPherson quotes Stone's son Christopher (one of the Stones' three children) as saying, "I hate to speak for him, but I think he felt there were enough critics already and there was no need to add anything." Stone was not only one of the leading journalists of the last century; he was specifically a moralist with a grand global scope. It seems more than a small oversight that he mainly missed the story of the greatest mass murderer in history.

It has become quite difficult to connect to the idea of Communism as an essentially good cause. MacPherson is too attached to Stone and partakes too fully of his way of thinking to explain it, but in her biography and his own work there are clues. Two points about Stone seem especially important. First, he believed, for almost all his life, not only that domestic Red-hunting was as utterly terrifying as a pogrom but that Fascism was a real, looming possibility in the United States (at the outset of the Cold War, he even moved his family to Paris briefly) and required concerted resistance. Second, late-nineteen-thirties Popular Frontism—with its dictate that people on the left must not criticize one another openly but band together against the larger enemy—appealed to Stone so strongly that he never really abandoned it as an operating principle. Like many thirties Communists and fellow-travellers (that's what he once called himself late in life), Stone was a great America-lover. He conferred on himself a more regular-guy name than the one he was born with—Isadore Feinstein—and he constantly invoked the Founding Fathers as his intellectual and political touchstone. He was a civil libertarian and a defender of individual rights, and his life in the *I. F. Stone's Weekly* period showed how committed to those principles he was. But Stone was far too much the outsider, ethnically, culturally, and even physically, to feel truly at home in football-weekend American culture.

There is not much to do but shake one's head at Stone's regular assertions that his own ideology was a blend of the thinking of Karl Marx and Thomas Jefferson. How could those two possibly be blended? Never mind Stalin: even prospectively, Communism never gave the individual the foremost place of honor in the social system, never regarded state power as suspect, and never treated free speech and dissent as sacred principles. Lodged somewhere deep in Stone's soul was the dream of a covenant so firmly dedicated to the good that it could be trusted completely—even though he also believed the opposite, as evidenced by the title of MacPherson's book. He lived cheerfully with this contradiction for his whole life. In his seventies, Stone learned ancient Greek and produced an investigative speculation called "The Trial of Socrates," but this hardly represented his turning away from the concerns of a lifetime. Instead, he wound up back inside the same old conundrum: the impossibility, for him, of believing that an ideal society (Athenian democracy) could be capable of an unpardonable crime against a dissident (the murder of Socrates).

If Stone ever felt the impulse to produce a comprehensive statement of how he believed society and politics ought to function, he resisted it. That was a task that Walter Lippmann relished: he produced a series of manifestos that shock the contemporary reader, because they are so nakedly élitist. Such work from Stone might shock us even more if he had produced it. Instead, he treated the world, even the ancient world, as a succession of stories to be covered. ♦



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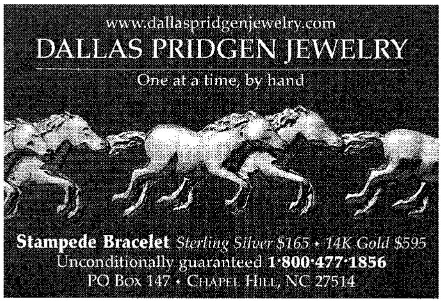

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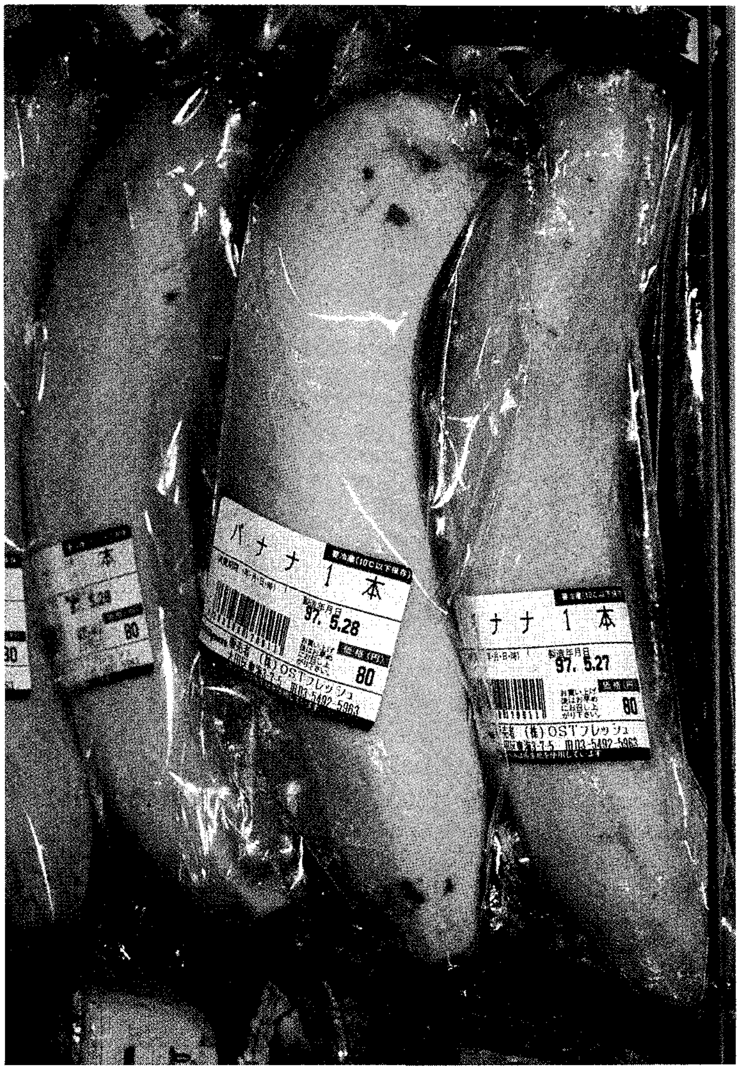
FICTION

THE CONFIDENCE DECOY

BY ANN BEATTIE



Francis would be driving his Lexus back from Maine. His wife, Bernadine, had left early that morning, taking their cat, Simple Man, home to Connecticut with her. Their son, Sheldon, had promised to be home to help out when the moving truck arrived, but that was before he'd got a phone call from his girlfriend, saying that she would be flying into J.F.K. that afternoon. So he was gone—when was Sheldon not outta there?—though the moving men were perfectly capable of unloading furniture without anyone's help. What had Bernadine imagined—that Sheldon would have ideas about decorating, about what should go where?

Francis's aunt had died, and, since he was one of only two surviving relatives and the other, Uncle Lewis, was in an assisted-living facility in California, the emptying of her summer house had fallen to Francis. Uncle Lewis had asked for the pie safe and for the bench in the entryway, nothing else, maybe an Oriental rug, if the colors were still good and it wasn't very big. Francis had rolled up the small Tabriz, which he tied with string and put in the bottom of the pie safe.

A few days earlier, Sheldon had taken his father aside to ask his advice: should he become engaged to his girlfriend now, or get the first year, or even the first two years, of law school behind him first? Sheldon and Lucy had already discussed marriage, and she seemed in no hurry, but he hadn't liked her going off to teach English in Japan with no engagement ring on her finger. Francis thought Lucy a nice young woman, pretty, neither shy nor aggressive, but, really, despite the many occasions on which they'd interacted, he could not get much of a sense of her. She'd twice been involved in car accidents in the past year, both times when she was driving, but that didn't necessarily mean anything—three times would have been more definitive. The biggest clue Francis had got about Lucy had come one morning after she'd spent the night, when she'd come down to breakfast late, wearing a T-shirt and jeans, and trailing her underpants in one leg of the jeans. Bernadine had whispered to her, and Lucy had turned bright-red and snatched up the underpants, stuffing them down the front of her jeans. She'd had no sense of humor about it at all. Well, he couldn't imagine having come downstairs at the Streetmans' (what would it be—forty-some years ago?) after sleeping with Bern, because no such thing would ever have happened. They would have had him arrested. But this was a different age, and he had no objection to Lucy's sleeping with Sheldon in their house. They put their cups and saucers in the sink, and were extremely quiet. The TV in Sheldon's bedroom never went on, as Bern had pointed out.

Bernadine said that she liked Lucy, but Francis thought she might like her only moderately. For a woman who'd wanted a daughter, Bern was quite skeptical of other people's daughters, though her skepticism about Lucy took the form of mentioning little oddities and quickly adding, "Nothing wrong with

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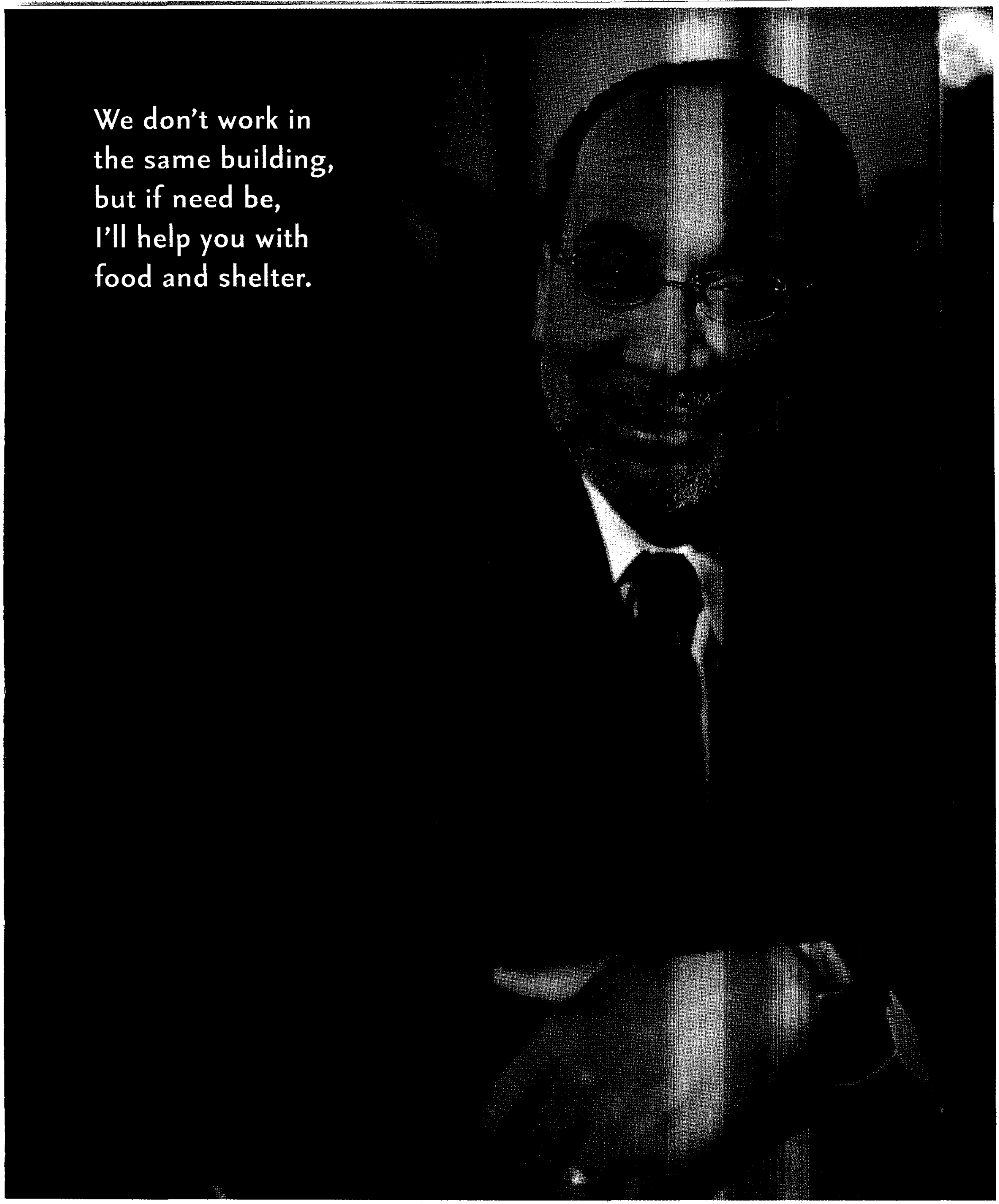
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that, of course." One of the things that there was nothing wrong with was Lucy's inability to cook—her ineptitude extending even to lettuce-washing, to not understanding what a salad spinner was. She recoiled from the blender and the toaster as if they might become animated without her touching them. She drank a lot of tea, so she could boil water. But why did she resist when Bern tried to explain how other things were done in the kitchen?

Then Bern had begun finding banana peels in strange places: thrown behind a flowering bush in the garden, or pushed into a vase. "Fortunately none in the linen closet yet," Bern said wryly. She had found two or three folded inside empty toilet-paper rolls in the trash; she'd found another buried in the little trash can that held lint from the dryer.

"What do you think?" she asked Francis. "Is it some kind of eating disorder? Some comment on something or other?"

"She's realized we're monkeys," he said, curling his fingers and scratching his ribs, puckering his lips.

"It isn't funny to me, Francis, it's upsetting. I've never known anyone to stash banana peels."

"How do you know it isn't Sheldon?"

"Have you ever once known him to bring any food whatsoever into this house? He doesn't even come in eating a candy bar. I've never once seen him with a cup of take-out coffee. He's so lazy he relies entirely on the groceries I bring home."

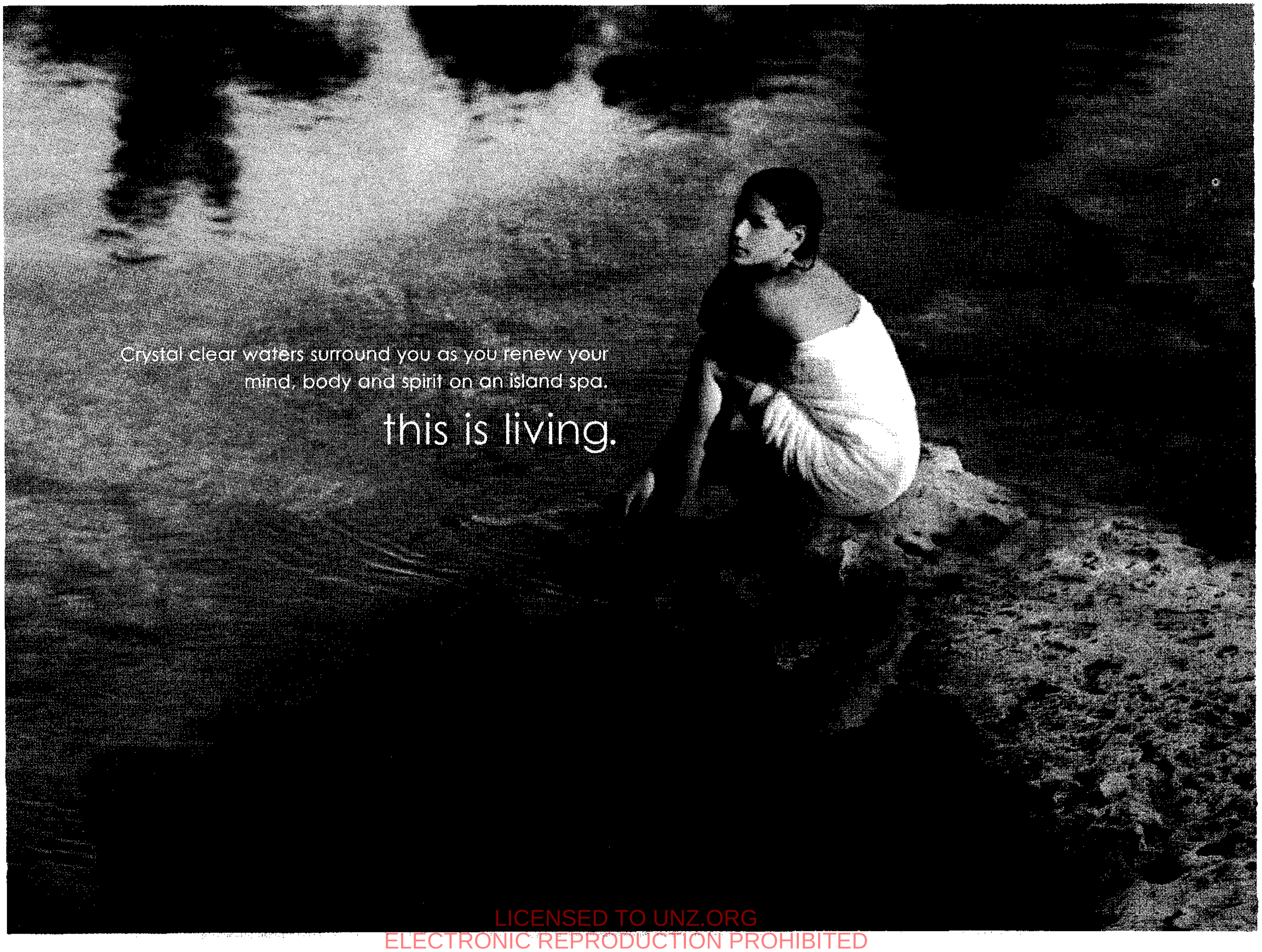
Francis put down his newspaper and looked over the top of his glasses. "Maybe it's a mating ritual," he said, but she'd already left the room.

Now Francis stood in the hallway of his aunt's house, wondering if it would be worth it to take out the ceiling fixture and replace it with something less expensive and less unique before the real-estate agent came back. This required outguessing the people who would eventually tour the house: would they be inclined to like everything, once they'd seen such a splendid light fixture, or would they breeze past, the men concerned about the basement, the women interested in the kitchen? He was contemplating calling Bern to ask her opinion when he saw the Burwell Boys Moving truck turn in to the driveway, sending gravel flying into the peony beds. A hollyhock went flying like a spear. Low-hanging tree limbs snapped off.

Two men wearing chinos and dark-brown T-shirts hopped out. "Mr. Field? How do you do, Mr. Field?" the burlier of the two said. "Moving day, Mr. Field," the other man said, retrieving a clipboard from the passenger seat. He had a couple of feathers in his shirt pocket. "I'm Jim Montgomery. My partner here is Don O'Rourke."

"Don," the partner echoed. "We want to do a good job here, make sure you got no reason to remember us."

Both men came forward to shake Francis's hand. Jim plucked a pen from


Crystal clear waters surround you as you renew your
mind, body and spirit on an island spa.
this is living.

between the feathers in his pocket. "Just need your John Hancock on the line, then we can get started."

Francis signed their forms, then led the movers inside. "My aunt's summer house," he explained, giving them a quick tour. He'd supposed that everyone in the area knew that his aunt was dead, though, of course, he had no reason to suspect that she would have met these particular men.

"Aunt didn't have tons of furniture," Jim said. "She an older lady?"

"Ninety," Francis said.

Don let out a low whistle. "Make it to ninety, then a couple of crooks come in and load everything out."

Jim crouched to examine a side table, then looked at Francis. "You tagged the pieces we load last?"

"They're both in the hallway. The pie safe and the hall seat." The movers had told Bern that they would be unloading these pieces to another moving company, which would transport them to California.

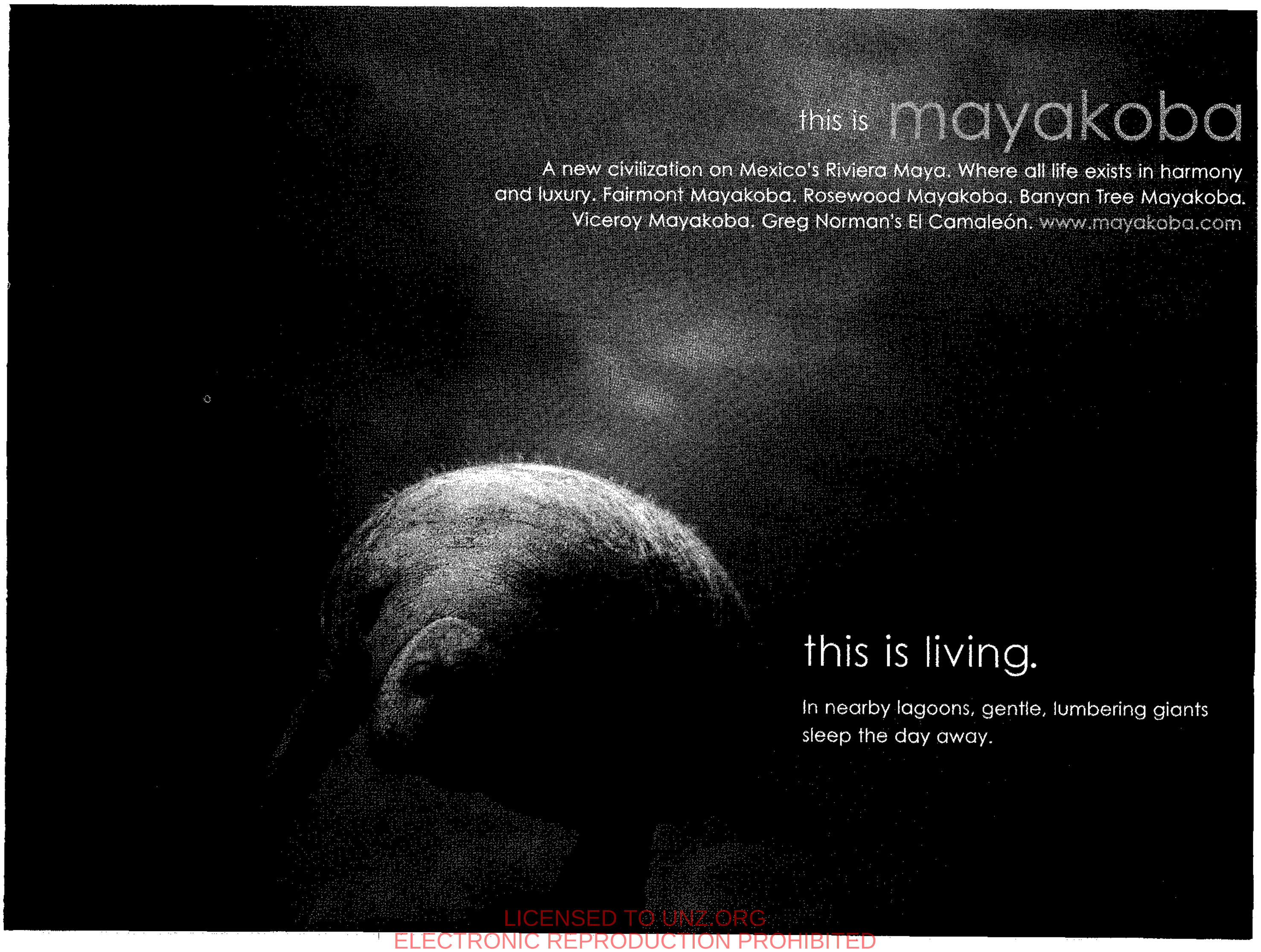
"We'll get started, then," Jim said. He turned to Don. "What that remark was about us being crooks, I won't ask."

"We took those six-packs of water from behind the 7-Eleven," Don said. He grinned at Francis. "Go to auctions, get things and distress 'em, bang 'em up and make 'em old."

Francis nodded, trying to indicate that, whatever they'd done, he did not intend to pass judgment. (It didn't much matter to him.) His wife had arranged for the moving men, who had been recommended—wasn't that what she'd said?—by the real-estate agent.

Jim and Don began issuing orders to each other, pulling furniture into the center of the room, moving quickly. Francis turned, pretending to have something to do upstairs. Over his shoulder he noticed something small on the floor and went back to see what it was, as the two men carried the Sheridan sofa out the door. It was Jim's feather. He put it on the chair cushion, where Jim would be sure to notice it, and returned to the stairs. He went up three steps, four . . . then stopped. Through the window, he saw the broken limb of a tree dangling over the front windshield of the moving truck. On the stairs, a dust ball grazed his foot, stirred up by the small breeze coming through the door. His aunt had lived to be ninety, and he was sixty-six. His son was twenty-four, which, he quickly computed, was the difference in age between his aunt and him. The computation meant nothing.

Francis had practiced law for years, and he did not think his son was at all suited to the vocation. But what was he suited to? He'd been a solid B-plus student, but he'd done very well on his law boards, and he had two very good letters of recommendation, plus one that Bern had helped him get from their congressman. Sheldon played tennis and golf, if that mattered. Lawyers were always disparaged and joked about; probably passion was not a prerequisite quality. Still, he imagined the worst: that Sheldon might get en-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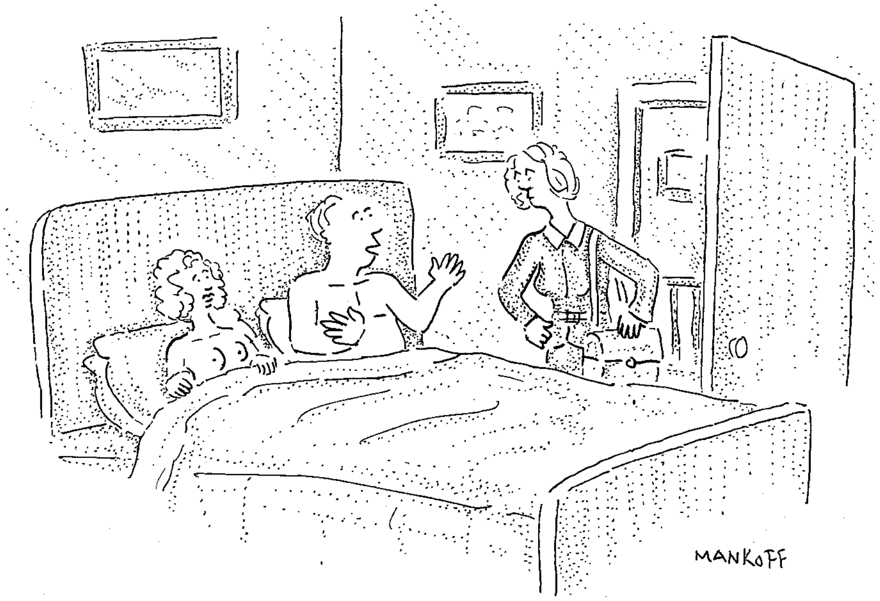

"Hey! Can't a guy have a hobby?"

gaged to Lucy just to keep her from other men; that, yes, Lucy did have an eating disorder, and, even if she didn't, being sneaky was a problem; Sheldon would begin law school then quit—Francis was entirely sure that that was the way things would go—and then he and Lucy would rethink things, though it would be too late if they were already married, or if she was pregnant. She was pregnant. That was why she was eating the bananas, he realized, standing on his aunt's stairs, the moving men coming and going, oblivious to him. She was coming back—Lucy was coming back from Tokyo early, because she was pregnant. He and Bern would be grandparents. Sheldon would be overwhelmed with responsibility. His life would be nothing but take-out coffee. He wouldn't have time to study if he wanted to. He would be in a relationship with a woman who did not love him, and whom he did not love.

"That feather," Francis said, standing (how had he got there?) in the living room. Jim and Don were sweating. The clipboard was on a table. Both feathers were in Jim's pocket. The pen lay on the clipboard.

"Yeah?" Jim said, patting his pocket.

"What is it from?"

"From? From a bird. I picked it up because I didn't recognize it, and around here I know the birds. After the hurricane, we lost a lot, then this spring we got some others that hadn't come around before. Big bird, obviously. I've got a book at home. I'm gonna check it."

"Do you hunt?" Francis asked. He was giving in to his nervousness, making idle conversation.

"Sure," Jim said slowly. "Hunt, fish. Only go after deer with bow and arrow, though. You wouldn't be one of those people who get upset because a guy wants to eat, would ya?"

"No, no. I was just curious. Because of your interest in birds. Whether you also hunted, I mean."

"Know what else he does?" Don interrupted. "Famous for his carving."

"Oh?" was all Francis could think to say.

"Decoys," Jim said quietly, almost shyly.

"People collect 'em," Don said. "Real artistry involved. He apprenticed himself to his grandfather. His grandfather's things are in that museum in Hartford, Connecticut. You must have been there."

"The Wadsworth Atheneum," Francis said. "It's not that close to where I live."

"Well, when you go there, you look for Roy Jay Bluefield's decoys. They're beautiful things, and my friend here is the bearer of the flame."

"I'd like to see your work," Francis said.

"You would?" Jim said. "I live in a workshop that would about fit in the living room of this house. Wife put me out three years ago. You would be interested in seeing decoys?" he said again, as if he didn't quite believe it.

Francis nodded.

"Tell you what," Jim said. "You go upstairs, like you were doin', and in an hour we'll be outta here. We can swing by my place on our way to Connecticut, if you were serious."

"Oh, I was very serious. Most serious," Francis added. That was right: he had been going up the stairs, and suddenly time had gone into a warp, and now it was much later. At this moment, if the plane had landed on time, Lucy might be telling Sheldon the news. That was how your life could change: someone would tell you something.

The moving men resumed giving each other orders, furniture was lifted and shifted into other positions, then something was selected and carried down the steps to the driveway, where the big truck sat. Francis thought again about calling his wife, but realized that she would still be driving home and wouldn't answer the cell phone. She would probably stop for groceries, which she bought most days, though they both had light appetites. Their son was taller and heavier and ate more than they did, though he was big-boned, rather than heavy. Six feet; a nice-looking boy, with thick wavy hair and those square glasses that all the young people wore unapologetically now. The novel he'd worked on in college had become a novella, then had been abandoned entirely, except for sections he obsessed over and had used to apply to various M.F.A. programs, not one of which admitted him. Good or bad, Francis had no idea; Sheldon would show his writing to no one. An entire year had passed after he finished college, during which he'd lived in their attic and—a bit histrionically, Francis thought—started and abandoned a second novel. Then he had moved out and worked for a year or so with a college friend, doing ordering for the friend's father's company, even taking a trip to London. Then—how exactly had it happened?—he had let his lease

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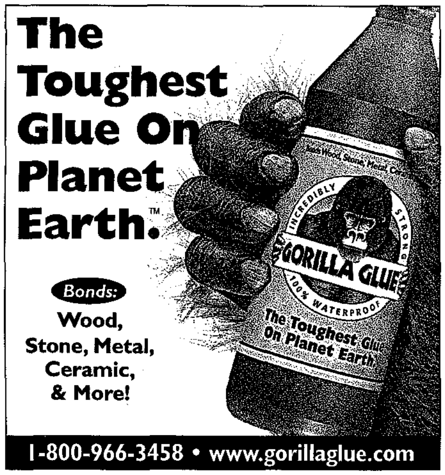
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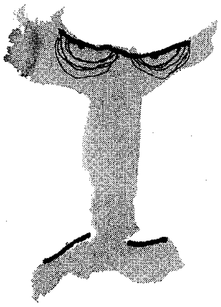
expire and had moved back into the house, forgoing the attic for his old bedroom, which he repainted charcoal gray. On the weekends Lucy often joined him there.

What did they plan to do? Have the baby and live in the house?

Francis had climbed to the second floor, where his wife had packed his aunt's clothes into boxes to be donated to charity. There was toile wallpaper in his aunt's bedroom. Near the end, his aunt, on high doses of painkiller, had thought she was stretched on a divan surrounded by a party of French aristocrats, the women dressed in feathery bonnets and carrying parasols, the men on horseback, all awaiting her cue to open celebratory bottles of champagne. Aristocrats, in a nine-by-twelve bedroom on the second floor of a house in rural Maine. Who knew what she'd made of them all being pastel blue? Perhaps that they were cold.

His aunt had died of pancreatic cancer less than two months after she was given the diagnosis. When she called them with the bad news, he and Bern had driven out to the house and cried and cried, unable to think of anything optimistic to say. His aunt had pressed jewelry on his wife, though Bern was a no-nonsense sort of woman who usually wore nothing but her wedding ring and a Timex. His aunt had told them her sensible plan for what she called "home help." She had asked him, as a complete non sequitur, to change the light bulbs in the hallway, but instead of doing this immediately they had talked more—Bern, in her strong way, had been very upset. And then he had left that night, forgetting to do the one little thing his aunt had asked of him. He had not remembered until almost the day she died.



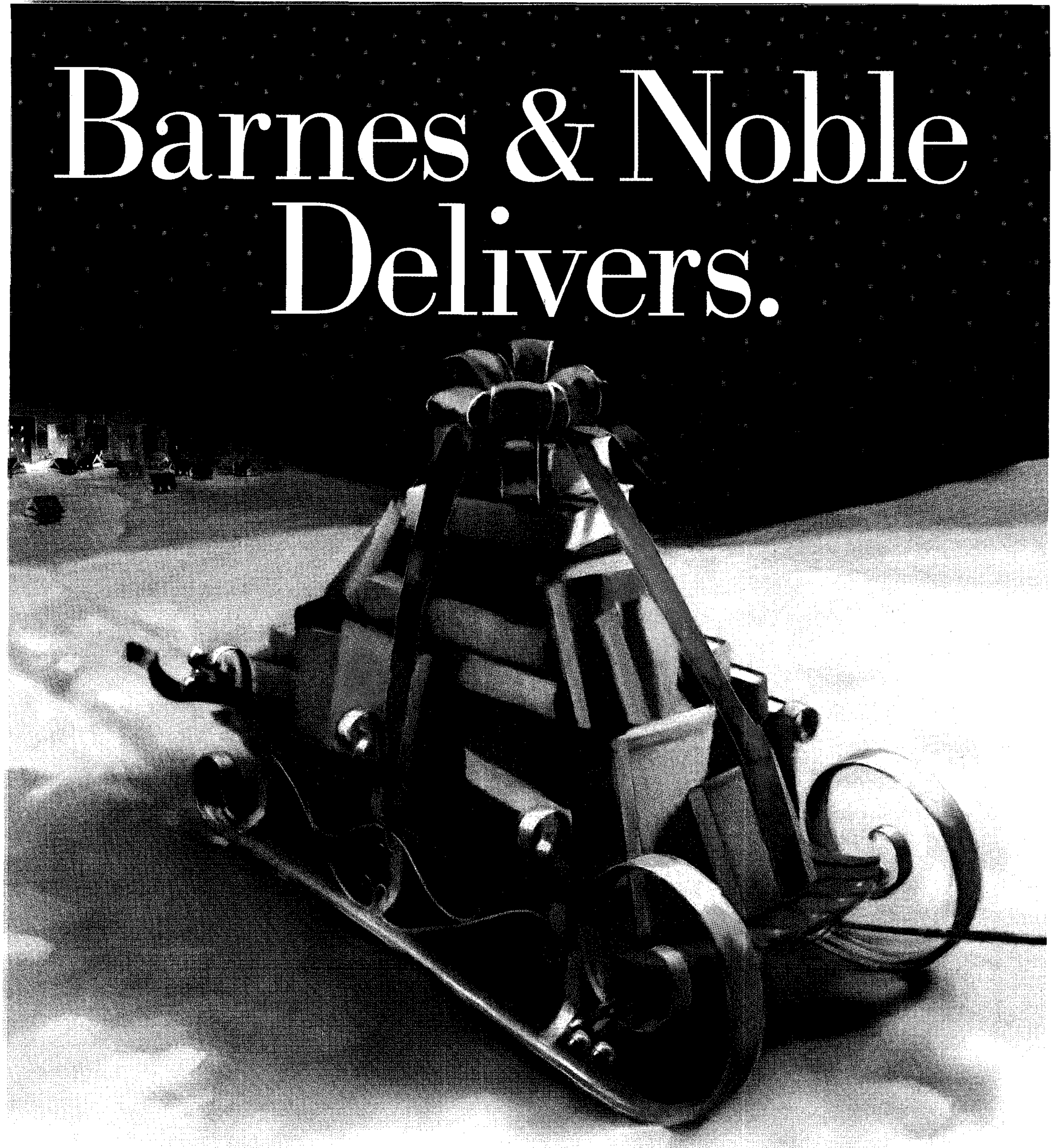
There was a faint odor of ammonia in every room, and he thought that might be what he'd been squinting against. Bern had opened all the blinds; it made the house look more spacious, the real-estate agent had told her. So where had his aunt's spirit gone, he wondered; had it lingered for a moment in the pastel confusion, then permeated the window—nicely bevelled old glass—to alight briefly in the now smashed tree? If so, she'd had a safe landing, leaving well before the moving van pulled in.

Francis never knew what was the proper amount to tip moving men. It had probably become more than he could imagine, if the average tip in a nice restaurant was at least twenty per cent, no matter how indifferent the service. He wondered if his seeing the decoys meant that he must buy one; if so, what would they cost, and shouldn't he tip the men before he got to Jim's workroom, because otherwise the price of purchase might be confused with the tip. Or, if he tipped generously in advance (whatever generously meant), might the decoy have a more reasonable price?

He backed the Lexus out to follow the moving truck down the drive. Jim drove faster than Francis expected, but he kept up, patting his pocket to make sure that his cell phone was there. They drove for a while, then turned down a rutted road where someone had put a red-and-black cone to indicate a deep pothole. The houses here were smaller than the ones on the main road. With all that he had to do, what was he doing going into the woods with two men to see decoys? It was the sort of thing that could turn out badly, though his instincts told him it would not. Still, he could imagine being in court, asking the defendant with a hint of skepticism in his voice, "You followed these two strangers to one of their houses?"

When the road forked, the truck slowed and Jim put down his window, pointing to the right with his thumb. Francis hesitated. The truck continued to the left, bumping onto a field. He thought he understood and took the right fork, stopping in front of a little clapboard house that stood alone, with no trees in front and only a half-dead bush in the side yard. It was, indeed, very small. Again he heard himself in the courtroom: "And with no hesitation you got out of your car?"

He got out. Don and Jim were walking toward him. He could tell from their faces that there was nothing to fear. Don was holding a can of seltzer. Jim—who looked much larger beside



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his tiny house—had a set of keys in his hand, though he used none of them to open the unlocked door.

"Used to live in a Victorian over in Milo," Jim said. "Wife comes home one day, says she's seen to it I can't come within ten feet of her. For nothing! Never laid a hand on a woman in my life. You can march into the police station, if you're a woman, and just get an order to have a guy gone from your personal space, like it hadn't been his space, too."

"Bitch," Don said, under his breath.

"Do you have children?" Francis asked.

"Children?" Jim said, somewhat puzzled. "Yeah, we had a kid that had a lot of problems that we couldn't take care of at home. One of those things," he said.

Don averted his eyes and toed a dandelion that had gone to seed.

"I'm sorry," Francis said.

Don said, "I got one wife, no kids, a bulldog, and half my life stacked up in some storage place by her brother's, since we had to downsize when the balloon came due. Downsized into my brother-in-law's garage! You know what I mean?"

He did, actually. "Yes," he said.

Jim tossed the big key ring on the worktable, which took up most of the room. There was a single bed pushed in the corner with a cat lying on it that looked something like Simple Man. The cat raised its head, then curled onto its side to continue its nap. There was a brown refrigerator in the corner opposite the bed, and a sink hung on the wall. The toilet sat next to the sink. He saw no sign of a shower.

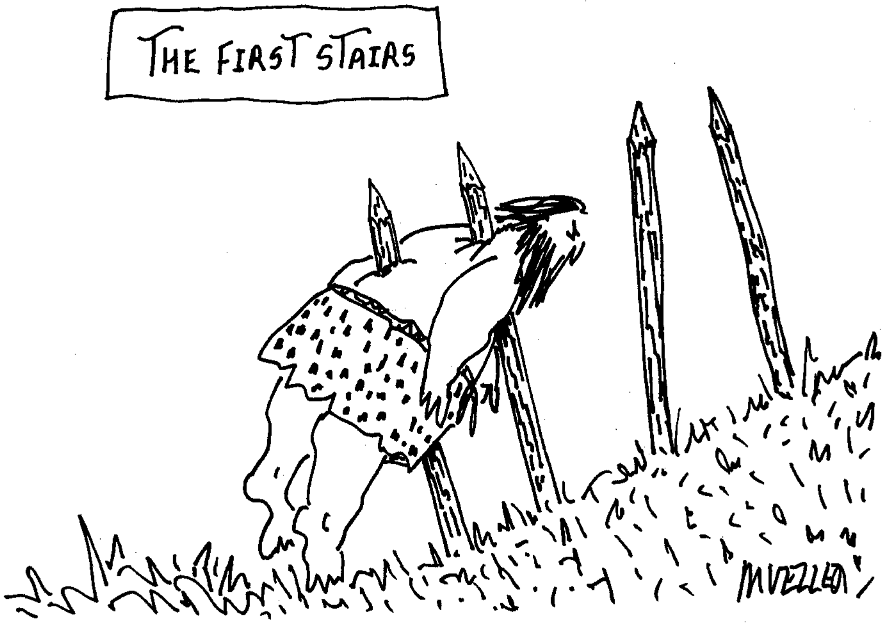
"Sit," Don said, pulling out a canvas director's chair. Francis counted seven such chairs, most of them similar to the first, but avoided the one that sagged badly.

"Could you use a beer?" Jim said.

"That would be nice," Francis said. He told himself, I can't call my wife, because how would I explain where I am? He reached for the can of Coors, which was icy cold. He could not think of the last time he'd had a beer, rather than a Scotch-on-the-rocks. He raised the can, as they all did, in silent toast to whatever they were toasting.

It did not look as though Jim had done any work on the table recently. There were piles of newspapers, dishes, something that looked like part of a saddle. In a glass, there were some feathers. Francis wished that he could see some wood chips. The table looked too low to carve on—you would stand to carve, wouldn't you? He saw with relief that there were a few tools, but the one he focussed on looked rusty. "O.K., let me get 'em out," Jim said, kneeling.

He lifted a box from under the table, opened the lid, and unwrapped a white towel inside. The box itself was beautifully made, with the word "Mallard" burned into the wood on the underside of the lid. Jim removed a duck and put it on the table.



"Un-fucking-believable," Don said, shaking his head.

Jim took a step back, cleared his throat, and said, rather formally, "Some would do it different, but I use black eyes on the mallards. Ten millimetre," he added. Francis stood with his can of beer, looking down. He wondered if he was supposed to touch it. It was quite convincing, and really beautiful. He moved forward tentatively, and, as he did, Don said, "Let me get that Coors outta your way," sweeping the can out of Francis's hand.

Francis held the decoy at a distance where he could see it clearly without putting on his reading glasses. Jim was pulling out other boxes. "Got one more to go, then I ship 'em off. Guy from Austin, Texas. He got himself an art gallery as a 'ship to' address, so maybe it doesn't matter if he's got no real idea what he's doing," Jim said. "Guy wants nothing but mallards, O.K., but if you're going to set out decoys, then, yeah, you can have mallard, mallard, mallard, mallard—lots of 'em. But you throw in one of these—" He set another box on the table, and unwrapped a beach towel. "This is your egret. You put all the mallards out there, but if you're going hunting you need something like this egret, for a confidence decoy."

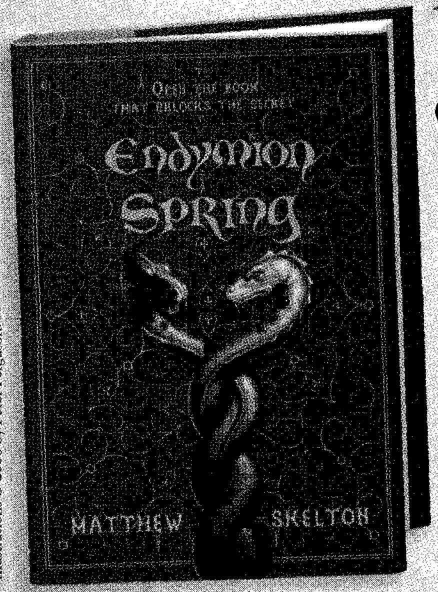
Francis had never heard the term, but he understood. In any case, the egret was a real piece of art.

"Yeah, like things are just nice and casual," Don said. "An egret happens to be standing around, you know? Could be something else. A crow. Got to mix it up a little bit, so the ducks don't get suspicious. 'Hey, look down there, quite a flock of 'em, even an egret wandered in. Let's go down and see if we can join the party.' " Don put his beer and Francis's on the table. "Bang!" he said loudly.

"That's the idea," Jim said.

"How many of these did you make for the man in Texas?" Francis said. He was amazed at the detail. He stared at the black eye, and it seemed to stare back, the way it reflected light.

"Just over a dozen. If he's a hunter, which I doubt from the way he talked and looked, maybe he's been having bad luck. That'll change when he gets this confidence decoy. Might have overdone it just a bit, carving an egret, but what the hey. You know, if you've got 'em in



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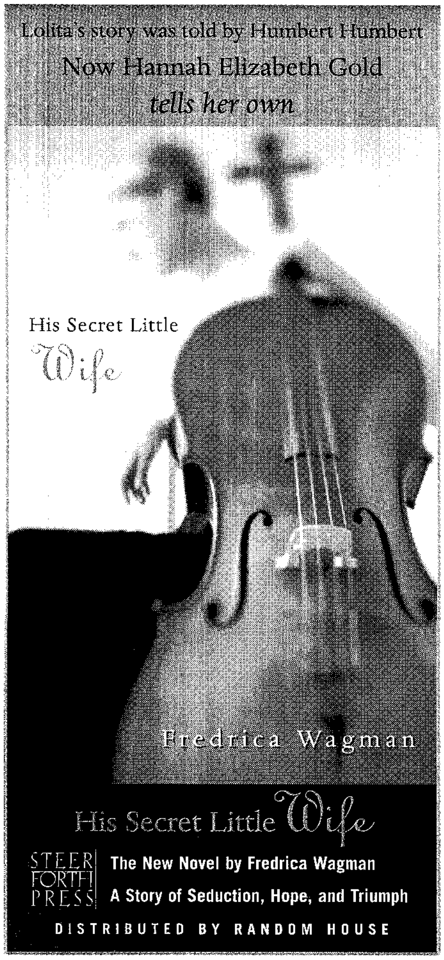

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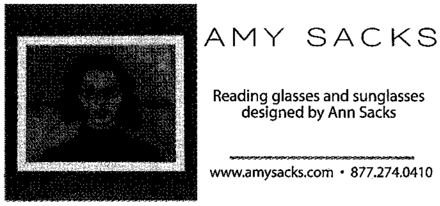

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fields, most of them will be eating, but then there's always one at least that acts as a sentry head. You think about all that while you're working. About how the whole flock's gotta look."

"Well, the detail is just incredible. You say you learned this from your grandfather?"

"Learned a couple of things on my own, I guess. Went to some shows, got some ideas."

"I do the naming," Don said. "I've got a kit. I'm enrolling in a course in special writing at night school, come fall."

"Calligraphy," Jim said. "We're a team."

"I wonder if you would be offended if someone who didn't hunt wanted a mallard just as a beautiful piece of handwork to put on his desk?" Francis asked.

Jim shrugged. "All the same to me," he said.

"May I ask what they cost?"

"Two twenty-five," Jim said. "Cost of eyes just went through the roof."

"They're worth every penny," Francis said. "They—I'm sure they do the job, but just as something to look at and contemplate . . ." He trailed off. "Would you have time to make one for me?"

"This is what I do," Jim said. "Sure."

"Well, may I give you a down payment? That, and of course I wanted to tip you, because the way you drive, you're sure to get to my house in Connecticut before I do!" Without waiting for a response, he reached into his back pocket. His finger slid through. His wallet was not there. He quickly patted his jacket pocket. Only the cell phone was inside. Then he jerked the chair back and felt shock reddening his face. He almost ran out to see if the wallet was on the ground, but tried to remember that nothing would be gained by being in a rush, by being sloppy. He walked back to the car, sensing both of them conferring silently behind him, searching too. The wallet had been full of cash, because he'd known that he would need to tip them. How would he drive without a license? He would have to notify the bank, American Express, too many places to remember.

"Bad break," Jim said, holding a can of beer toward Francis. "Worth going back to the house to look? It would be, wouldn't it?"

"This is hardly your problem," he said.

"Terrible feeling," Jim said. "I got my wallet picked at a Sox game in Boston, summer before last. Caused me no end of trouble. You think it might be back at your aunt's place?"

"It couldn't be. I mean, it could, but I would have noticed. It was empty up there."

"Let's leave the truck here and go in your car," Jim said. "Maybe it'll turn up."

"It's no use," Francis said. "I can envision where I was standing, and I know it wasn't there."

"You don't know," Don persisted. "C'mon, back we go. We'll impress you with our fast drivin'."

It was getting dark. Francis felt terrible, as if he'd lost a friend. He had lost his wallet only once before—left it behind in a hotel room, actually, and it had been returned to him empty. He tried to tell himself that twice in sixty-six years wasn't so bad, but both times had happened in the past year. He closed his eyes to envision the second-floor room in which he'd been standing. It was something he'd trained himself to do as a lawyer, to reimagine something. Something concrete, not something abstract, like an idea.

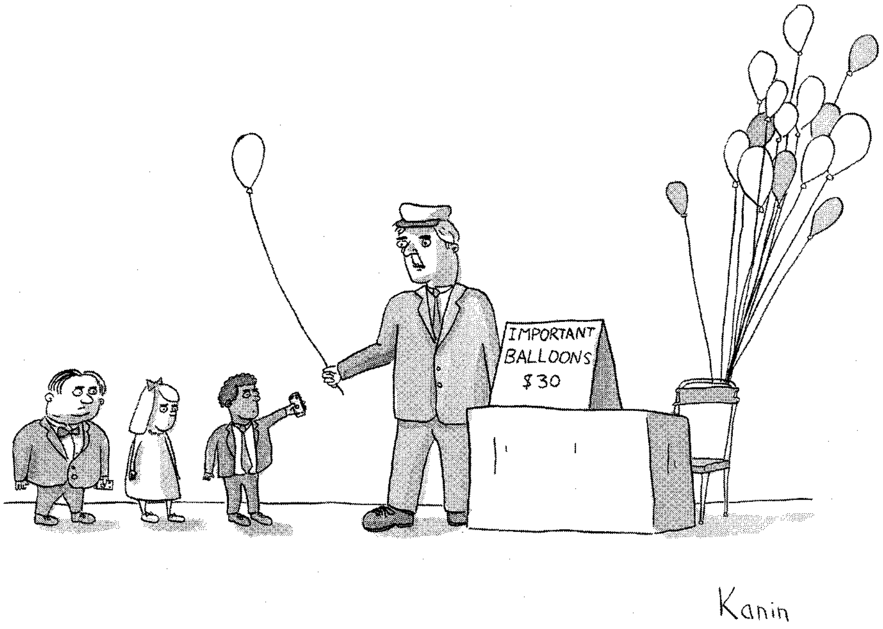
"You prayin' or something?" Jim said and held out his hand for Francis's keys. Francis shrugged and handed them to him. At least he hadn't lost his keys.

Jim drove as if they were being chased, taking a shortcut he'd had to avoid with the truck. When they pulled in to the drive and got out, Jim began to pace the lawn, in the last of the waning light, leaving Francis and Don to go inside. Francis began looking through the first floor, feeling utterly defeated. Then he heard someone bolting up the stairs. "We got gold!" Don shouted almost immediately. "Hunt's off."

It was unbelievable; what concluded that way, so easily, so well? He couldn't believe what he heard, and stood with his head turned toward Don's voice, perplexed, allowing only the slightest tingle of relief to pass through his clenched stomach.

"What's this? Is this a wallet?" Don said, stepping off the last step into the hallway.

In that second, Francis, who had never been paranoid, realized that the



wallet had been missing because Don had taken it. Hidden it somewhere. He had meant to go back later to get it. But then why had he insisted that they all come back there? Why had he produced the wallet so suspiciously soon? Why would Don do such a thing?

“Holy shit!” Jim said, giving Don a quick slap on the back when he and Francis emerged from the house. “He found it! Just like that, he found it! See?”

It was the moment when Francis, too, should have thrown his arms around Don. But he knew Don had taken the wallet. O.K.: maybe it had fallen out of his pocket, but then Don had noticed it on the floor and either pocketed it or put it somewhere where he could get it later. As sure as Francis had an instinct for anything, he knew that the man preening in front of him had both taken, and returned, the wallet. Because he wants to be the big man in his friend’s eyes, Francis thought. His more talented friend, whom he wanted to impress. Don was like those firemen who set fires so they can be heroes when they extinguish them.

“Where exactly did you find it?” Francis asked when they were back in the car, not turning to look at Don.

“On the shelf in the hallway,” Don answered. “Sitting right there.”

Francis searched his mind, but could not remember having gone near that shelf.

Zooming again through the dark back roads, Jim seemed energized. In the back seat, Don fell silent. The silence was deafening, but Francis thought it would be rude to put on the radio when he wasn’t the driver. He would almost certainly not select the sort of music Don and Jim would like. Fidgeting, he took the wallet from his breast pocket and tilted it toward him: it was accordioned-out with money. “I think I should give you the two hundred and twenty-five dollars now, rather than just a deposit. Will that be all right?” he said.

“Hey, I don’t turn down an offer like that,” Jim said.

“But then, separate from that, I want to thank you for working so quickly and getting everything out of there so well—I mean both of you, of course,” he rushed to add. An image of the broken tree limbs sprang into his mind. He blinked. “I’m much older than you two,” he said, “so will you permit me an awkwardness?”

“What’s that?” Jim said.

“I’ve never really known exactly how to tip, when furniture is moved. Never in my life. Is there some—”

“Like you’d tip a whore,” Don said.

“Excuse me?” Francis said.

“He’s kidding,” Jim said, disgusted.

“No, I’m not. Don’t you tip whores? They name a price, and you’ve got to pay it, but, if you really like what they did, don’t you give them a big tip and go to them again?”

“At my age, I’m not sure I’ll have any more moving jobs for you, unless it’s

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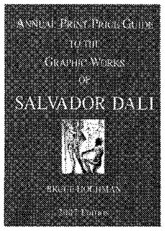
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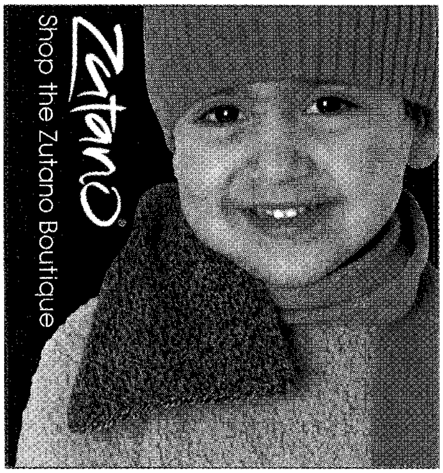

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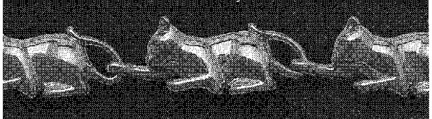

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moving us into the old-age home," Francis said.

"You never went to a whore, did you?" Don said.

"Shut up," Jim said.

"I'm not bragging," Don said. "I never did it in Kuwait. I did it once in Las Vegas, and once in the Combat Zone, when one almost pulled me outta my car. She was terrible, but the one in Vegas had red hair."

"I've been to Vegas," Francis said. "But you're right—not for anyone's services. I was with Hugh Hefner, who had to fly there to pick up the sister of that month's Playmate, to help Miss November, or whoever she was, get her twin into rehab. They were only seventeen, lying that they were eighteen."

"What?" Jim said. "You're puttin' us on."

"No," Francis said, with the dismissive tone of someone telling the truth. "No, I was advising Hugh Hefner about a legal matter I'm still not free to disclose. We talked business on the plane, because we thought a trial might be coming up soon. I found him to be a gentleman. This was long before he went everywhere in pajamas."

They rode in silence for a moment. Then Jim said, "So did it work out O.K. with the sister?"

"She completed rehab but died in a skiing accident," Francis said. He could feel it as if it were yesterday: Hefner's broken voice on the phone, going straight into his ear.

"You wouldn't have struck me as the sort of guy who hung out with Hugh Hefner," Don said.

"I was a lawyer," Francis said. "Lawyers meet all kinds of people." He let the comment hang in the air. What he still did not know was how one calculated a tip. He decided to delay payment until the furniture was unloaded, which might have been the way to do it, in the first place.

By the time they got on the road with the truck, it was after ten o'clock. They drove for a while, and then Francis blinked his lights several times; eventually, Jim responded by pulling to the side of the road. It was late and Francis was tired. He asked Jim if they could check into a motel. The two detours had cost them several hours, and Francis was having trouble staying awake. He was worried for Jim, as well, and insisted on paying for their room. Jim thought it over for a second. "Sure," he said.

Half an hour later, as they registered for two rooms at a Hampton Inn, Francis handed Jim a folded-up wad of money. "For the decoy," he said solemnly, as the night clerk handed them their key cards. Don had fallen asleep in the truck but stumbled out, groggily, when he realized where they were. He stood outside the door on the passenger side, blinking, his hair matted. He looked young, and helpless, and for a second Francis felt sympathy for him—he'd acted impulsively, then regretted what he'd done, because he wasn't a bad guy, after all. Tough lives, both of them had. Fighting in the Gulf War. Having a damaged child.

Jim said that he would wake Francis early if he was sure he wanted to follow the truck. Why did he want to follow them? But Francis insisted that he did, and then Jim and Don hopped back in the truck to drive to a faraway but well-lit area that the clerk had said was for large vehicles. They went their separate ways without saying good night.

"Bern?" he said, sitting on the side of his bed.

"God! I thought you'd never call!" she said. "Where are you?"

"A Hampton Inn," he said. "Has everything gone to hell?"

"It's terrible," she said. "Lucy's mother calling, like a woman possessed, forgetting it's three hours later on the East Coast, and poor Lucy at wit's end, trying to calm her. And Francis, it is unbelievable to me, but Sheldon is no help whatsoever. He went out for a walk! A walk! If I were Lucy, I'd never speak to him again."

The non-smoking room smelled of cigarette smoke. Did it come as a surprise to him that people did not follow rules, when unobserved? He pinched the tip of his nose between thumb and finger, let go, but the itching continued. He rubbed his nose. "What is her mother so upset about?" he said.

"The crash landing! What do you

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think she's upset about? Three people died."

Francis let his mouth drop open. "Crash landing? The plane crashed?"

"You heard it on the radio, didn't you? Somewhere?"

"No," he said.

"You didn't? Then what did you mean by asking—"

"I thought there was trouble between them," he said.

"I just assumed you'd heard. They almost didn't let the passengers who survived leave the airport. The investigators are coming to our house, Francis, at the crack of dawn. Something about someone on the plane telling his seatmate it was going to happen. Francis, go turn on the television."

Francis didn't move. He took in what she'd said with dumb shock.

"And Francis," she said, "I do not have the slightest idea how we raised a son who could not reach out and comfort poor Lucy—who stalked off, instead, to take a walk."

"Maybe he lives in his own head, like his father."

"This is not the time to reproach me for criticizing you, Francis. Whether you do or do not live in your own little world, in the larger world, poor Lucy was two seats behind someone who died."

"Horrible," he murmured. "He's still on his walk? Would it help if I spoke to Lucy, do you think?"

"I've given her an Ambien, poor thing. Her mother is hysterical about the U.S. government and wants to give us all a civics lesson, dragging in the war in Iraq. She's a terrible woman."

"Lucy's asleep upstairs?" he said. He suddenly felt quite exhausted himself.

"Yes, of course. What did you think—that I'd have her stretch out on the sofa?" His wife's voice broke.

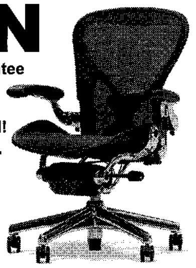
"We're coming home first thing in the morning," he said.

"Who is 'we'?"

"The moving men. There was some confusion about my wallet and we were delayed. I thought it best to put us all up at a motel. We'll set out first thing in the morning."

"What do you mean, 'confusion'?"

"One of them took my damned wallet, then felt remorse and returned it. But do not breathe a word of this to either of them, do you understand? I want to re-



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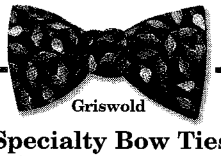

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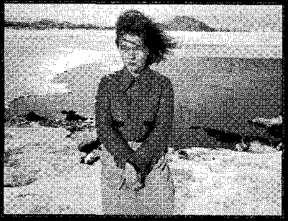

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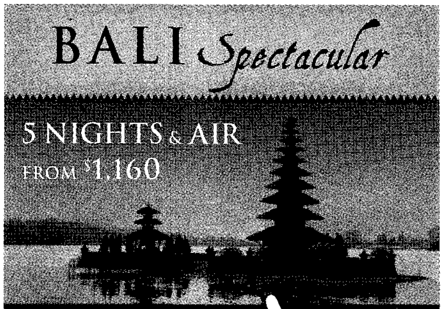

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main cordial and simply conclude this move.”

She sniffed. “I suppose it’s very late, and I might not be understanding you,” she said. “You have the wallet, you and the moving men will be on your way. All right. But tell me, Francis—what do I say to our son about his behavior, when he returns?”

“That he’s an insensitive asshole, I guess.”

“I don’t think I should cross him,” she said quietly. “He got very angry when Lucy’s mother upset her, as if that was Lucy’s doing.”

“Get some sleep,” he said.

“We’ve raised an immature idiot,” she said.

He nodded, but of course she could not see him. “Sleep,” he repeated.

“He has a screw missing,” she said.

“See you tomorrow, early,” he said.

“You have your wallet? That all worked out all right, did it?”

“It worked out,” he said.

She said, “For God’s sake, turn on the television.”

At the Continental-breakfast buffet, he saw Jim sitting alone at a circular table. Jim had piled two Danish pastries onto a napkin—for Don, Francis was sure. A cup of coffee sat on the table, with a lid on the cup. “Didn’t hear the news until this morning,” Jim said. “Seems like plane stuff happens a lot more than it ought to.”

“Do they know what caused it?” Francis asked.

Jim looked at him. He seemed more tired than he had when they checked in. He had circles under his eyes, dark, like a raccoon’s. “They tell us what they want us to hear,” he said.

“Your friend Don,” Francis said, pulling back a plastic chair. “He obviously looks up to you.”

“He wanted the two of us to spring my son and take care of him, you know that? Go on welfare and take care of him.” Jim shook his head. “He’s somethin’,” he said.

“Would that not be at all possible?” Francis said.

“No, it wouldn’t,” Jim said. “You’d know that in one second.”

“He miscalculated, then. He obviously looks up to you,” Francis said again.

“Yeah, well, it’s no ‘Brokeback Mountain,’ ” Jim said, taking a big bite of his bagel.

Francis tried again: “I think he might do things—say things, maybe—to impress you.”

“Scare me, is more like it. My son’s a pretzel,” he said. “Not one doctor, ever, thought anybody could take care of him anywhere but in an institution.” He got up. “Ten minutes, out front,” he said.

Francis stood to get some coffee. “I hope I didn’t offend you by asking whether Don’s idea might have some viability,” he said.

“No, it’s just that Don’s not my kid, and sometimes it feels like he is.” Jim started for the door, shaking his head. Then he turned back. “If he pressured you into saying you wanted one of the decoys, and you don’t, no hard feelings.”

“He didn’t do that. I want one very much. You do beautiful work. You’re a real artist,” Francis said.

Jim nodded slowly. “My grandfather was better, back twenty years ago, but I stick with it, and every now and then I learn something.”

“The price is very reasonable,” Francis said.

“If I have more money or less money, things are about the same, I notice.”

“You didn’t feel you had to quote me a low price, for any reason?” Francis asked.

Jim looked at him.

“You know, it might be a little tense at my house. My son’s girlfriend was on that plane. That’s bad enough, but she’s also pregnant, and he doesn’t want to marry her.”

A look of concern flickered over Jim’s face. “You’re full of surprises today,” he said. He seemed to be debating continuing on his way or staying rooted to the spot. “Tell him not to,” he said. “If he’ll listen to your advice.”

“I wanted to prepare you, because there might be a bit of tension in the air,” Francis said.

“We’ll just carry the furniture in. Leave,” Jim said. “We’re just the moving men.”

“My wife sometimes deals with her anxiety by remaining rather aloof.”

Jim nodded. “Not lookin’ to make friends with your wife,” he said.

“Five minutes?” Francis said.

“About,” Jim said, turning and walking across the breakfast area’s chaotic carpeting, which looked like shards from a broken kaleidoscope, the wild colors dusted with crumbs.

"Your friend Don," Francis said, coming up behind Jim. "Is he like a bad kid, sometimes? Does the wrong thing?"

"That's shit-shootin' sure," Jim said. "But what can you do?"

"I don't know what to do about my son," Francis said. "Like you said—he's my son. He isn't very likely to listen to me."

Jim nodded. "Worth a try to stop him from marrying somebody he doesn't want to marry," he said. "Life doesn't hold a lot of happy surprises."

"That's exactly what I think," Francis said.

"Friends, family, they get you every time," Jim said.

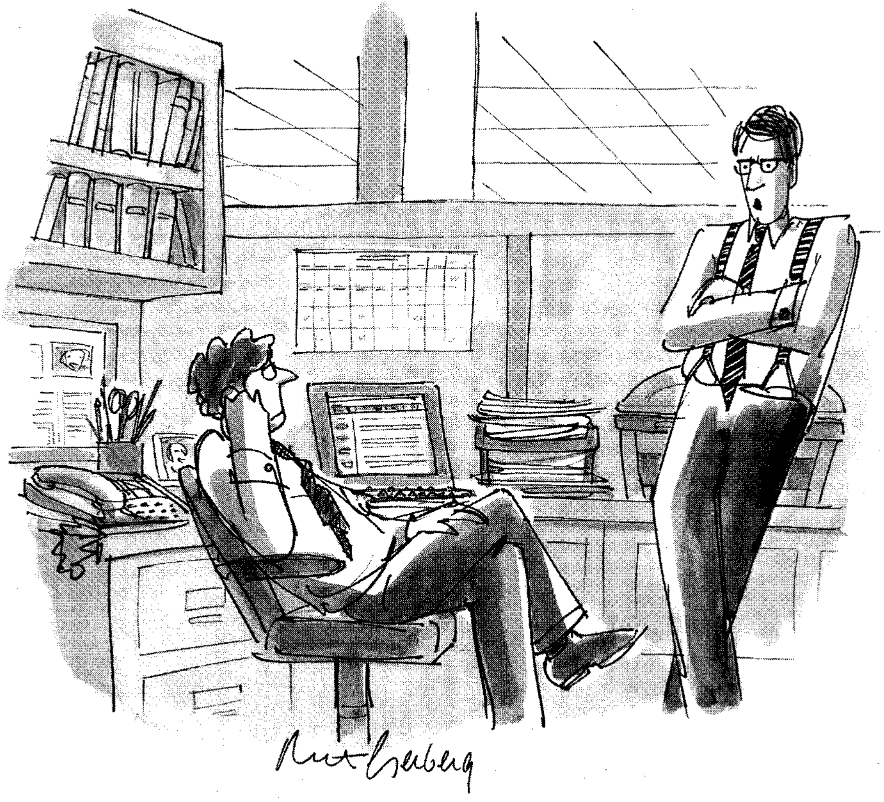
With that, Francis felt sure that Jim had known about Don and the wallet, or at least he'd known that Don was capable of having hidden the dropped wallet so that he could return for it later. Otherwise, what would they have been talking about? Friends and family?

Francis took a deep breath and entered the oppressively gray-walled bedroom where Lucy lay facing the window. She had told his wife that she and Sheldon had been writing and talking to each other, and that they had decided to separate, but at the last minute she'd e-mailed him from Japan and asked him to come to the airport. Then she had done a very bad thing: she had insisted, when she was finally allowed to leave J.F.K., that he wouldn't have cared if she had died. She wanted it both ways: to break up with him, and also to have him love her. Lucy told Francis that Sheldon had pointed that out, calmly but coldly, and when she would not let up he had stalked out of the house. So it hadn't been as simple as Bern had reported.

Still, he knew there was more. She did not look pregnant, but maybe she just wasn't showing yet. Or maybe she had done something about it.

"Lucy," he said, sitting down on the bed, "when I practiced law, I was often successful because I followed my instincts. I used to clear my head by closing my eyes and letting my mind drift until I admitted to myself what I knew. Lucy?"

"You and your wife have been very good to me. I don't know why your son holds you at a distance, but when I was here I was imitating him, for no good reason. I guess I was wary, because I've always been overwhelmed by



"I say, if at first you don't succeed, redefine success."

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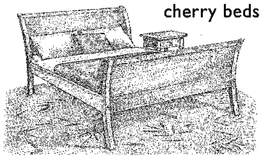

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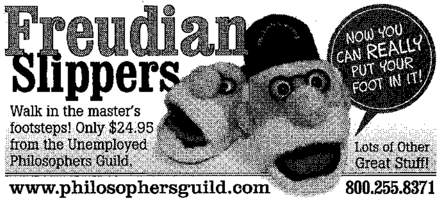

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my parents. My mother, in particular."

"Before we get off track," he said. "Because my mind does wander and I do get off track when I shouldn't. I quit practicing law before other people noticed that—good to quit when you're still on top. But my mind wandered somewhere recently and it came to me that you were pregnant."

She rolled toward him and stared, wide-eyed. Perhaps it was the background—the gray walls—that made her look unusually pale. "How could you know that?" she whispered.

"Do you want to know? Because of the bananas," he said. "Though it was Bern who noticed the banana skins."

"Oh my god," Lucy said. She rolled away, facing the window again.

"But she didn't put it together," he said. "I didn't either, at first. Maybe if you'd left out empty jars of marshmallow cream and pizza boxes, it would have been easier."

"Just bananas," she said.

He nodded.

"You know, and you hate me," she said.

"Hate you? Bern and I like you. It's our son whose behavior—even if you were mixed up, jet-lagged, scared to death . . . still. He should have been more understanding."

"Where is he?"

"I'm not clairvoyant," he said. "Sometimes I close my eyes and things come to me, but most times they don't."

"What are you going to do?" she said.

"Me? Would it be O.K. to ask what you're going to do?" He looked at her long, thin legs. Her flat belly. "Or what you've done?"

She sprang up suddenly. She said, "I'm afraid to tell him. I don't know if I missed him because I wanted to convince myself that I loved him, or whether I really do. My mother will kill me. She put me on birth-control pills when I was thirteen."

"You returned early because you have to deal with this," he said.

She nodded.

"He'll come back, and you two have to talk it over."

"Does your wife know?" she said.

"No."

"You didn't tell your wife?"

"I thought I was right, but I wasn't sure," he said. "In fact, if I'd been wrong, it would have taken me down a peg. It would have made me wonder whether something else I'd just recently figured out might not have been wrong, too."

"What might have been wrong?" she said.

"Oh, that someone stole my wallet, then decided to look like a hero by finding it."

"You knew the person who took it?" she asked. "Did you tell him that you knew?"

"Why would you assume it was a man?" he said.

"What?"

It wasn't the time to play with her; she was in a bad way—she didn't realize that he was trying to tease her into examining her assumptions. He said, "No, because I couldn't prove it. But I more or less told his best friend, the one he wanted to impress, that I'd realized what was going on."

He put his hands on his knees, getting ready to stand. She shifted her weight onto her hip, following him with her eyes. "Do you know what I should do?" she asked, as he stood. "I don't have a lot of time."

He thought about it. "I'd think you'd want to talk this over with Sheldon, as soon as he shows up."

"Nothing tells you that he won't show up?"

He smiled. He'd impressed her too easily, when usually he understood very little. Common sense told him that his son—his lazy, spoiled son—would return to the family home, if only because there was nowhere else for him to go. Even now, he could sense Sheldon watching, the way ducks circled decoys, waiting for some instinctive sense that everything looked right, that it was safe to move in; fooled by the sentry heads (that would be Bern, sitting in her chair with her embroidery, her head cocked in semi-disbelief at the way her life was turning out). The mallards would look harmonious, feeding as they bobbed on the water, much the way lawyers struck a pose to suggest how effortlessly they kept themselves afloat. Then the eye would travel to the oddly lovely egret, who just happened to have landed in his bed, having drifted in after a long flight. Francis smiled at his own conjecturing: who was really the writer in the family, he wondered. His son would keep himself apart a bit longer, making his calculations: Things in place? Feeding time? The most ordinary of things going on? The egret would verify the ordinary by interjecting something different. But then—to extend the metaphor—his son would be wrong, and he would fall into a trap, though not a deadly one: nothing worse than domesticity, nothing he couldn't escape. Francis thought that he, himself, might have left long before, when he first realized that he'd married a good woman, but not a woman he would die for, and that their only child was deeply flawed. Did he regret having stayed? No. He had never believed in the idea of perfection. Nor did he believe that he was owed a reward for staying: Jim's mallard would merely represent the receipt of something he had paid for.

It did not ever arrive, with or without its white towel, with or without its burnished coffin, and he did not pursue it. In two days' time, though, his son returned home. ◆

TO ANNA AKHMATOVA

I sent you a rose in a glass of champagne
while the Gypsies played as the Gypsies do.
Then you turned to the man you were with and said,
"You see his eyes? He's in love with me, too."

That night you left me a look in the mirror—
a look I've had too much of.
And the Gypsy singer kept jangling her bracelets
and singing of love, and of love, and of love.

—*Alexander Blok*

(*Translated, from the Russian, by Paul Schmidt.*)

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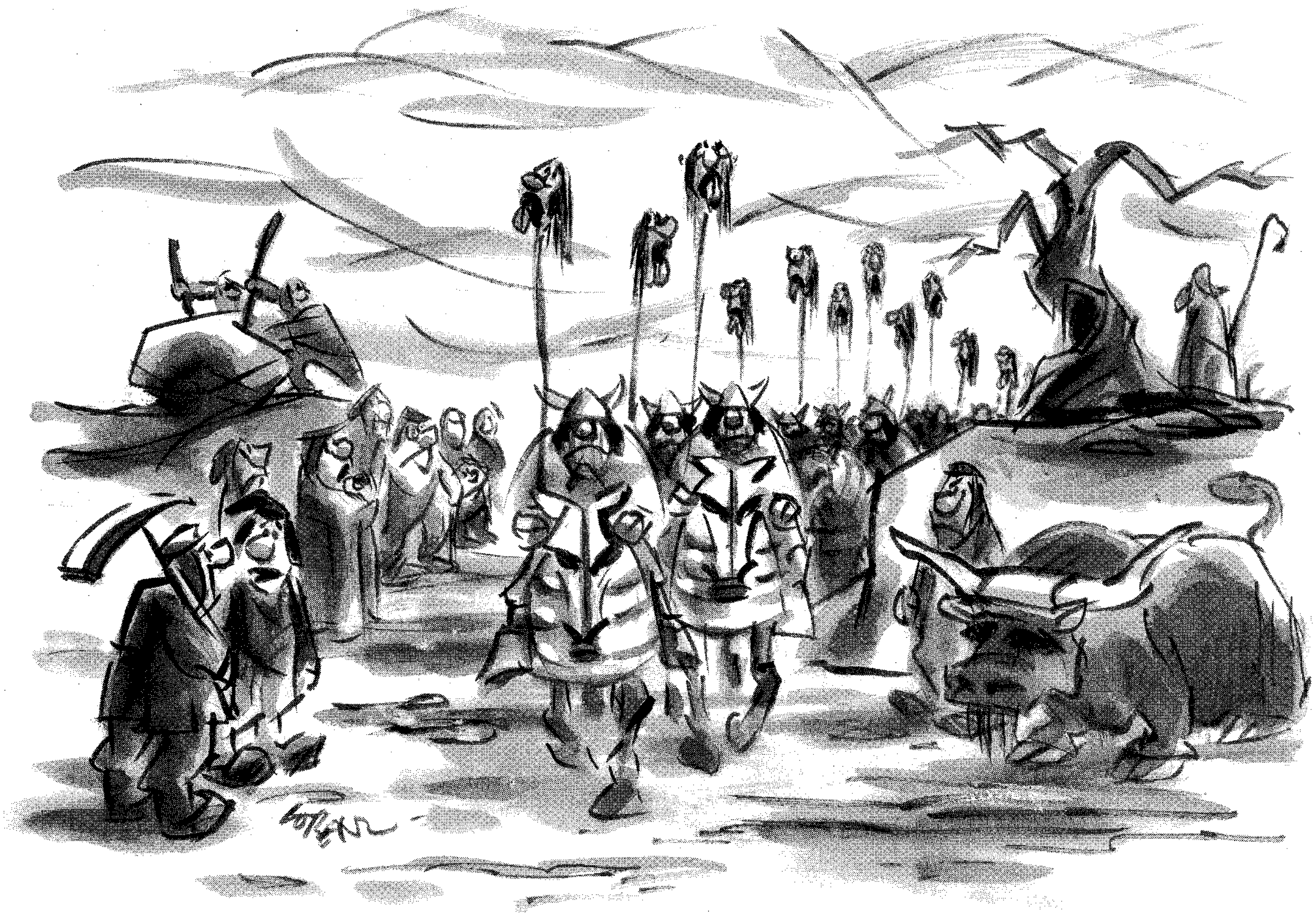
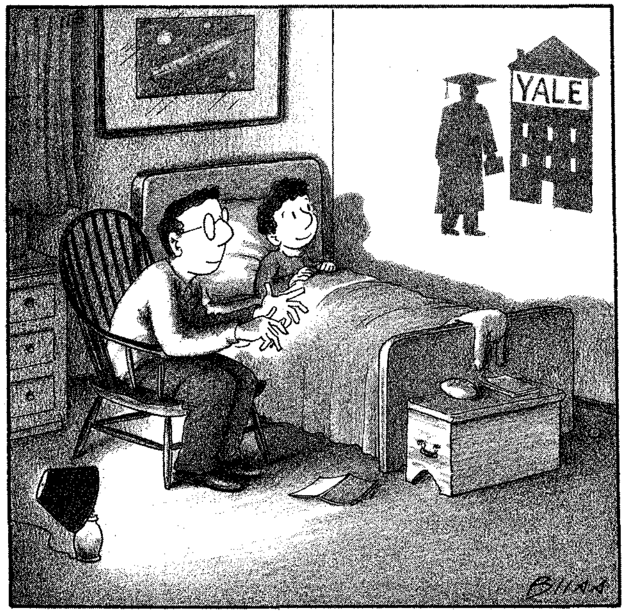
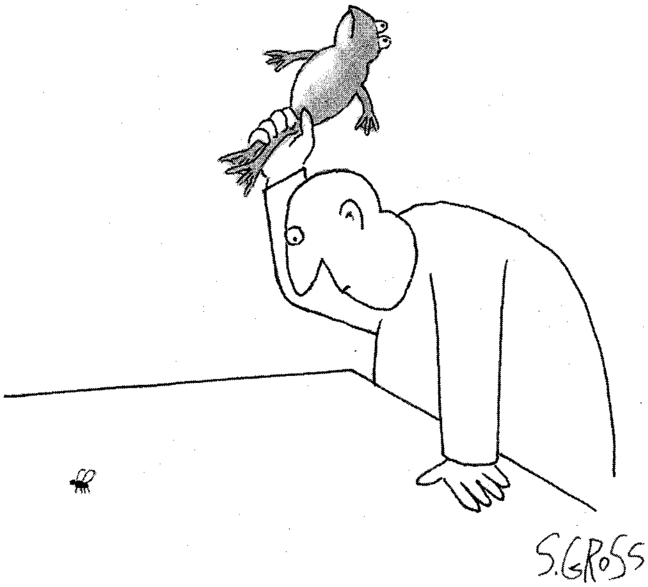
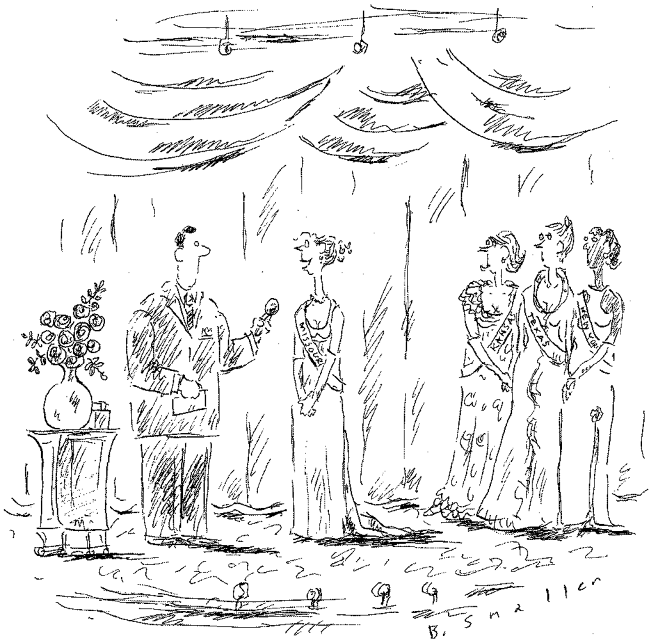
THE FUNNIES



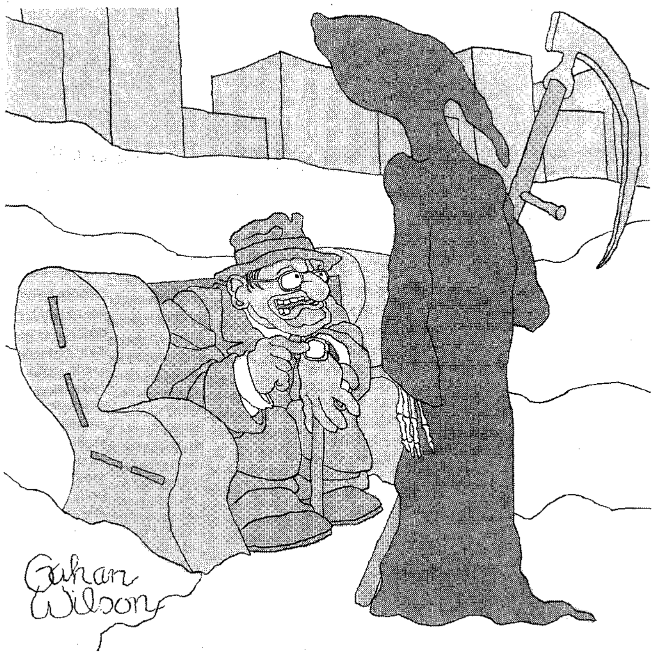
"They were good people, but they were wrong."



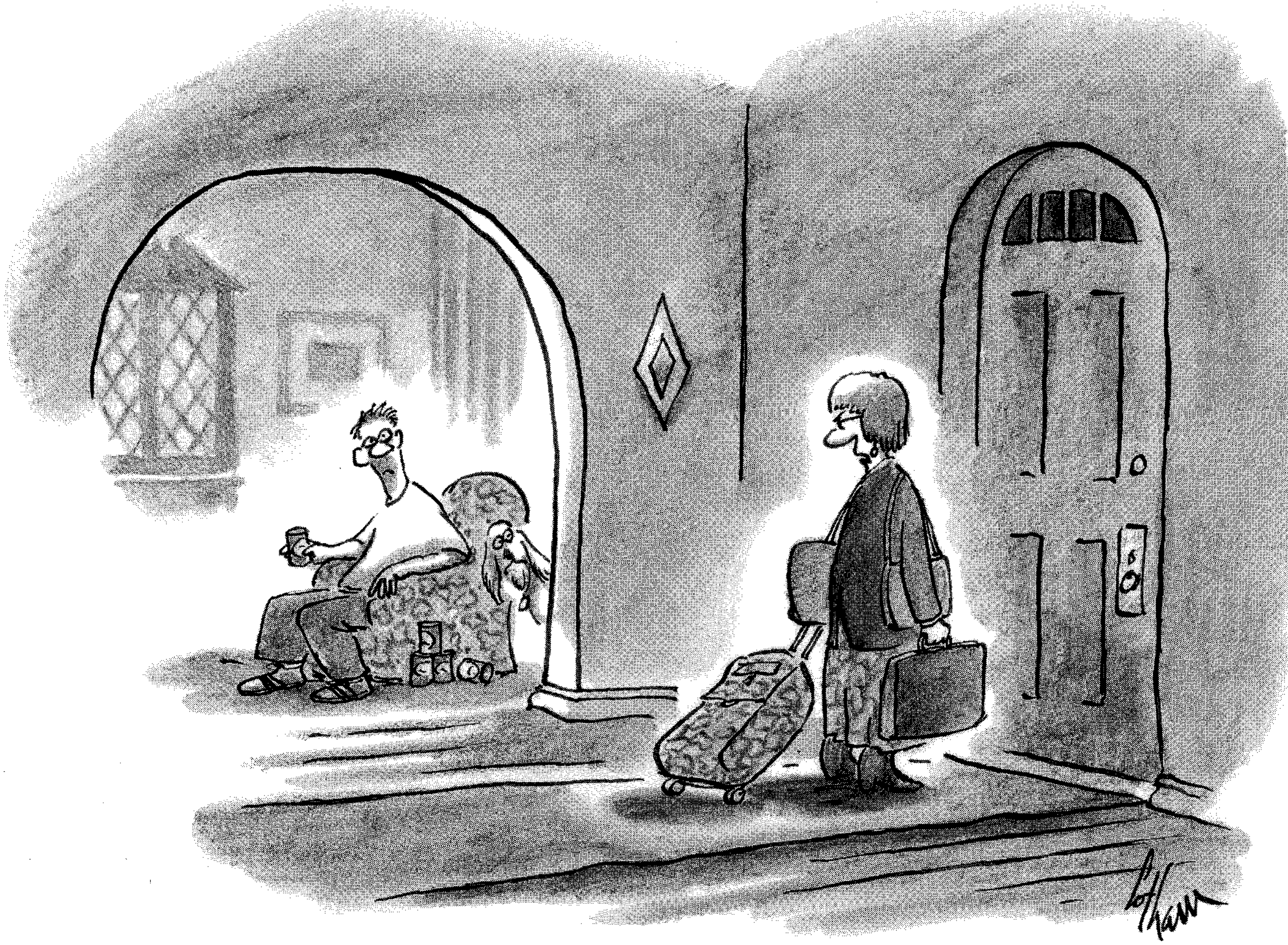




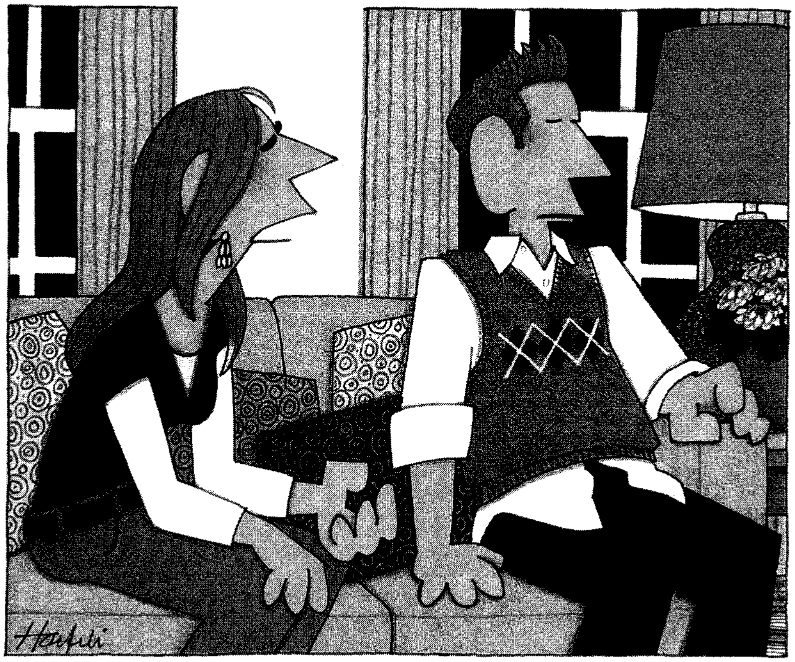
"I'm Miss Missouri, but my goal is to become Miss California."


Gahan Wilson

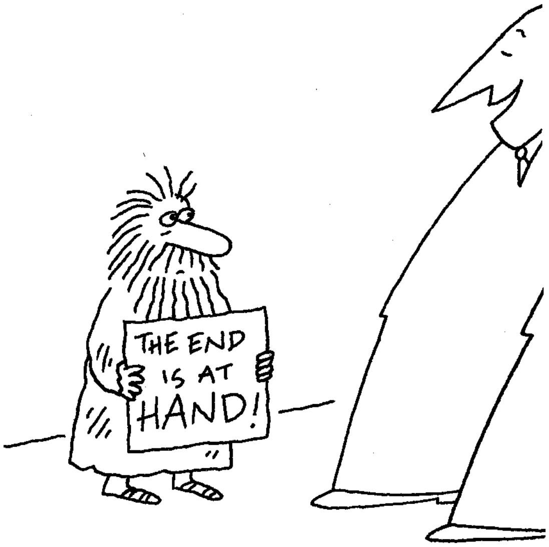
"You're late."

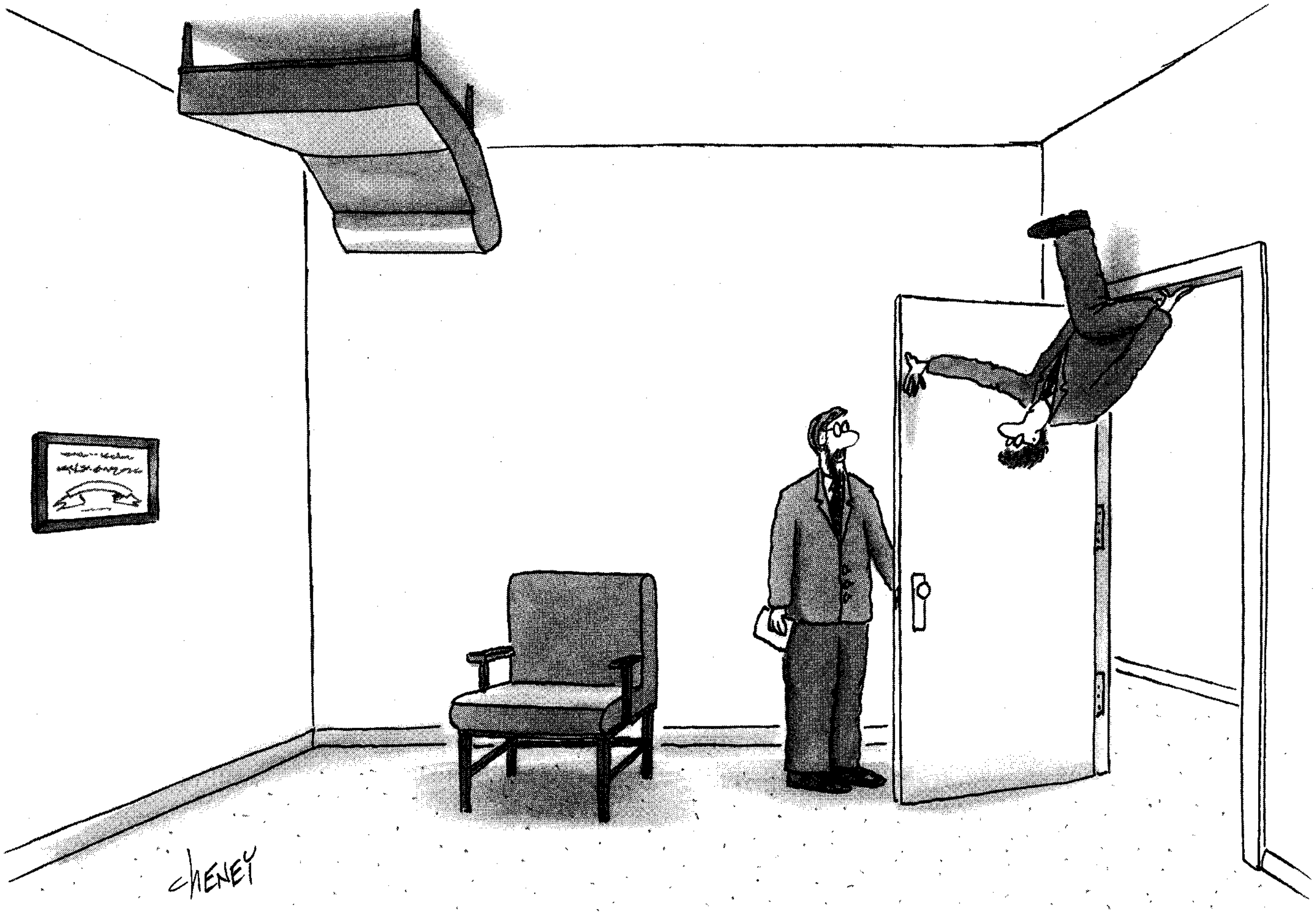


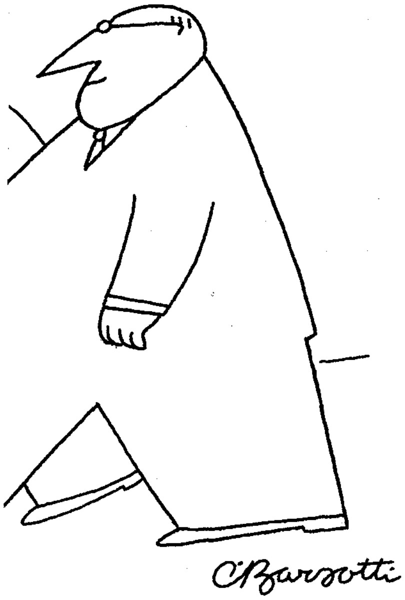
"No, this is not part of an evacuation procedure."



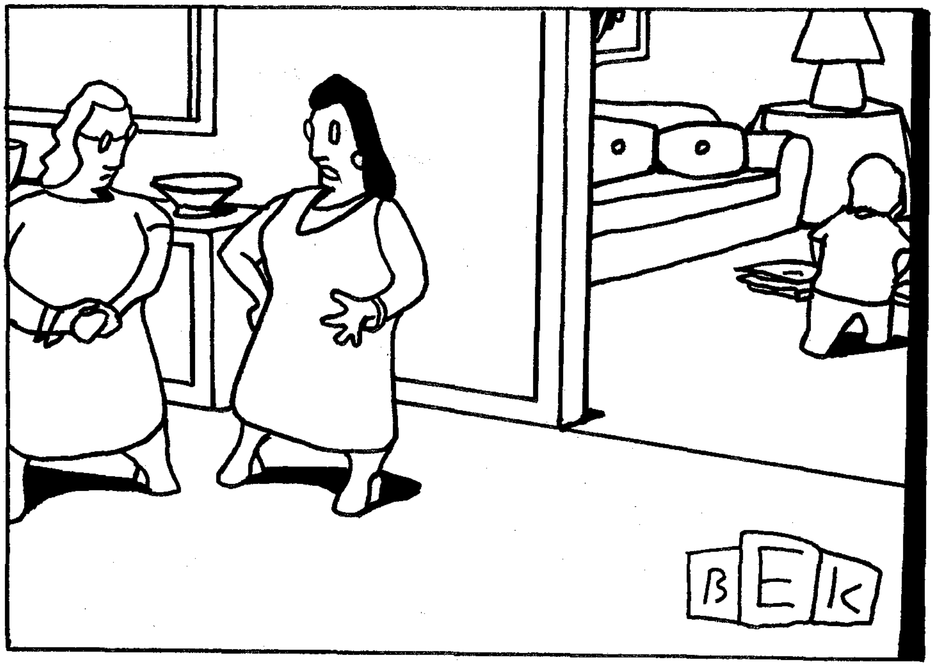
"I wish you'd open up to me. I need some ammunition."


THE END IS AT HAND!

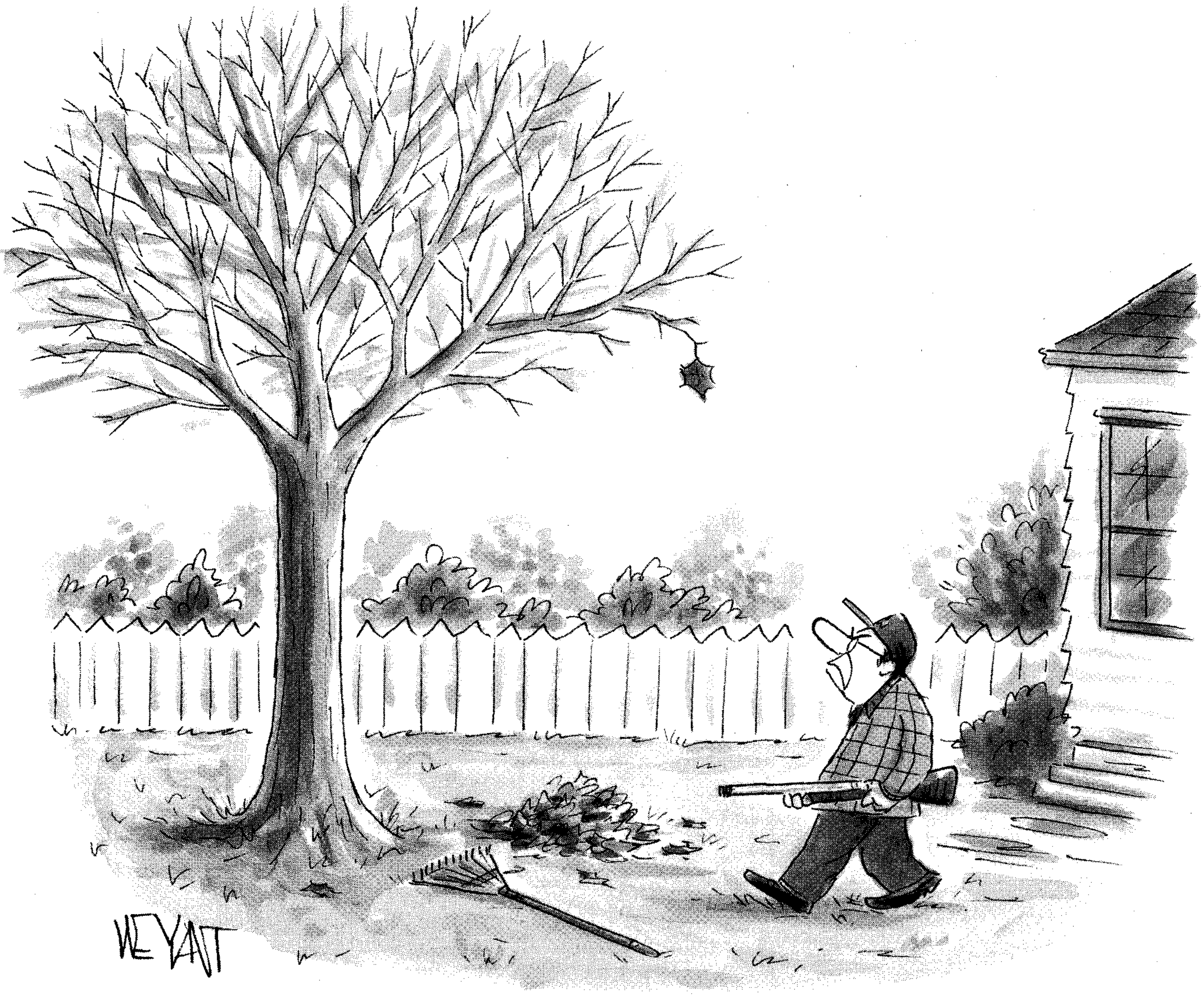


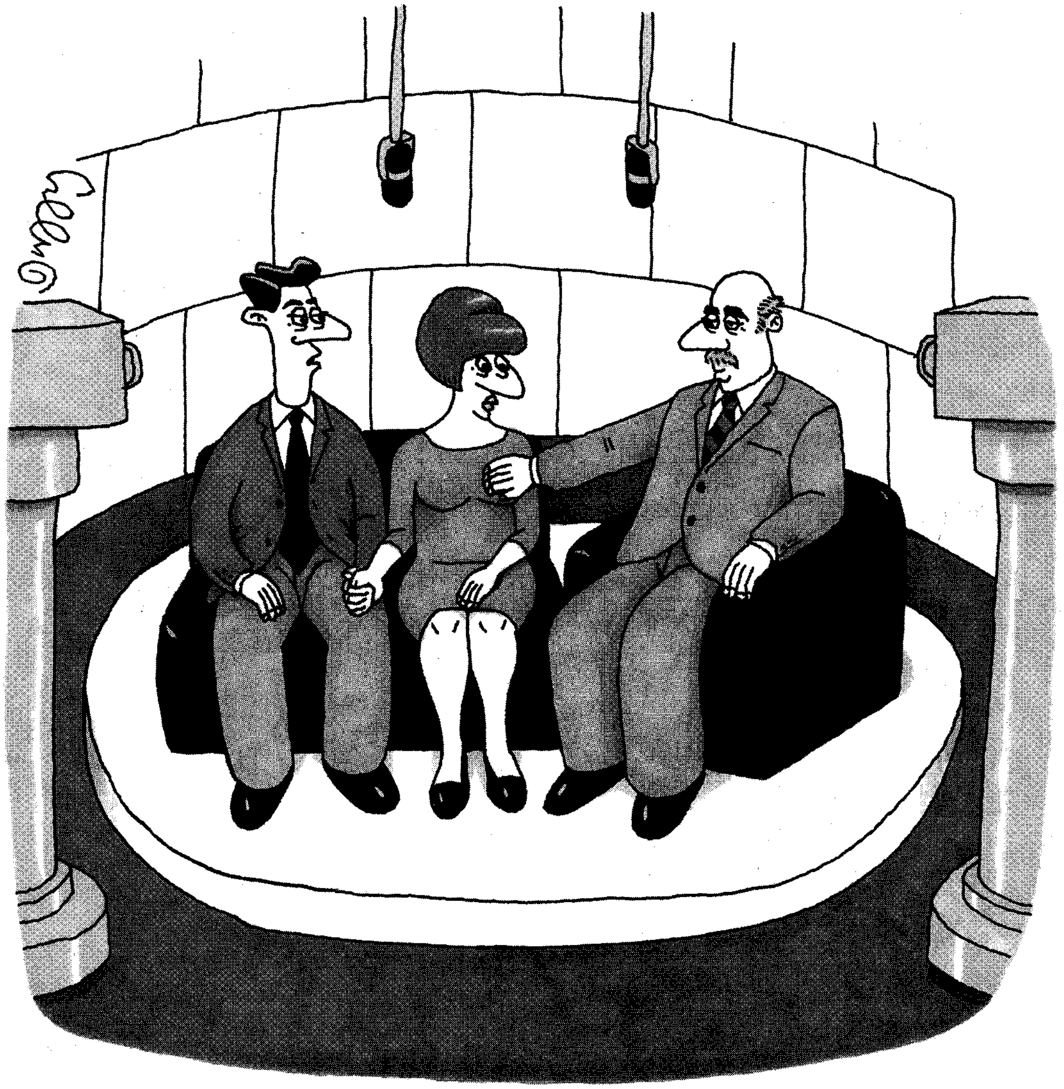


"Relax—we'd know."

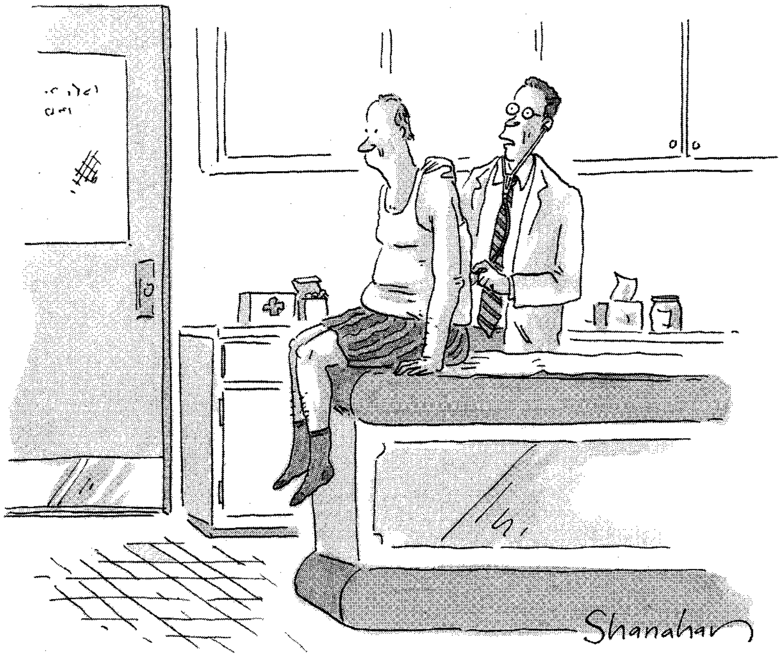


"I told him to come back when he's truly gifted."

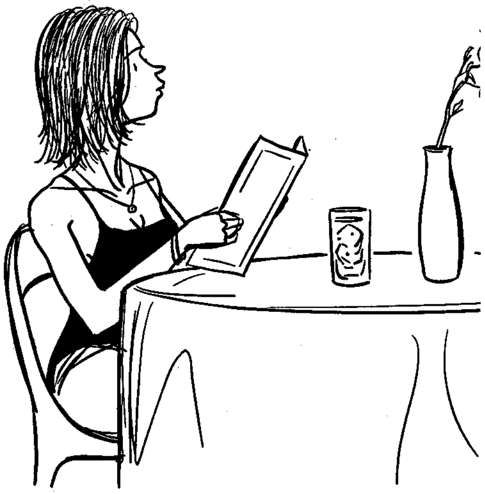


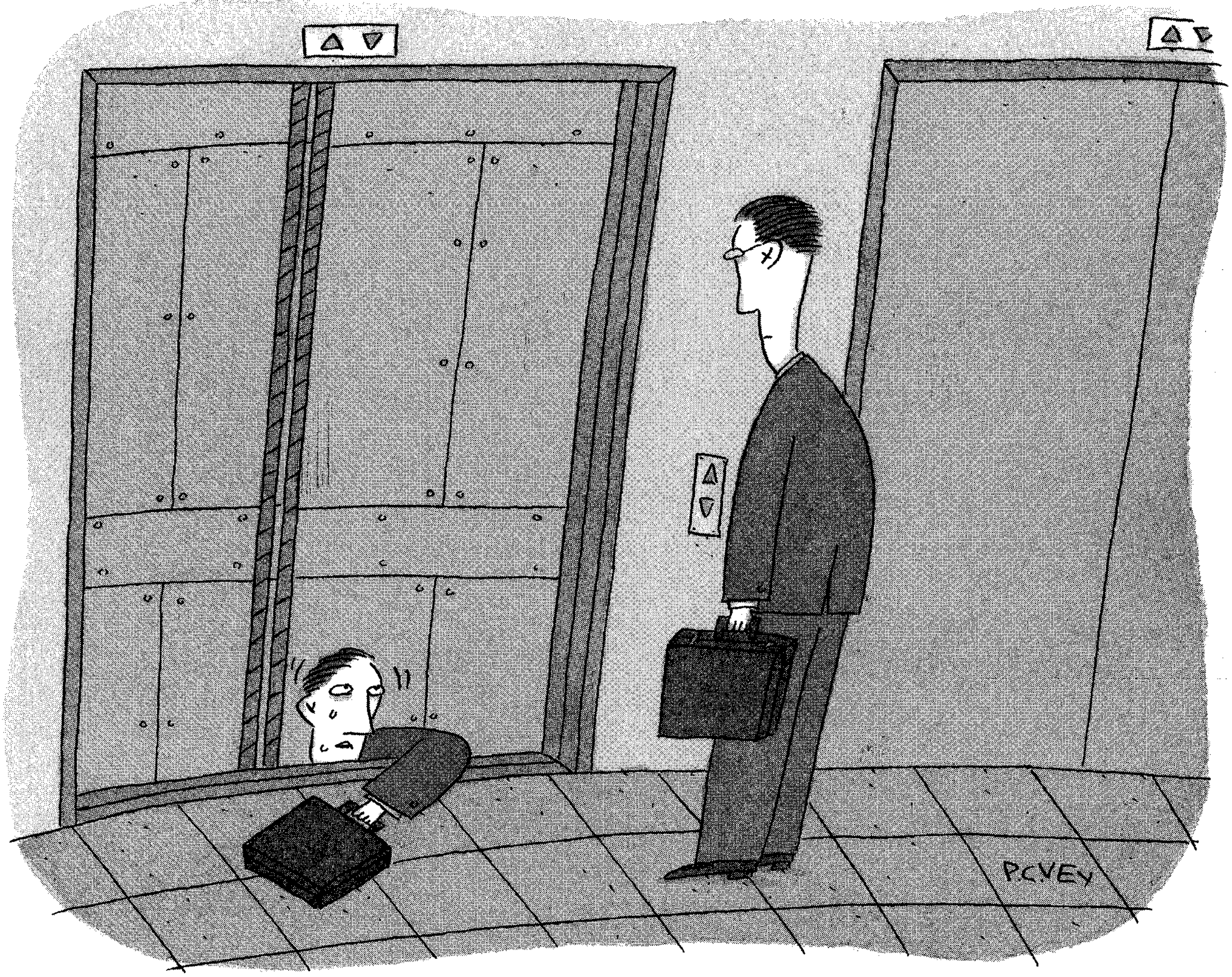


"Thanks for the advice, Dr. Phil. I'll take it from here."

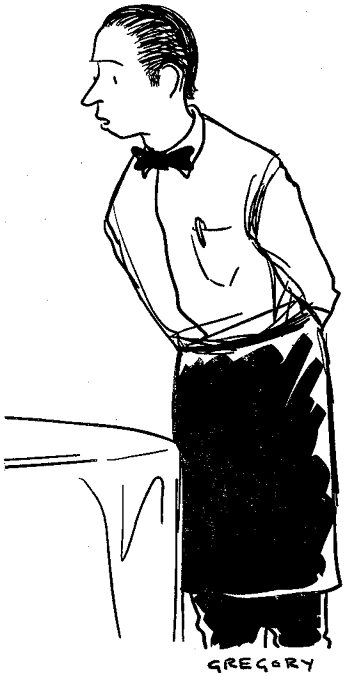


"Please tell me you just ate a bucket of eels."

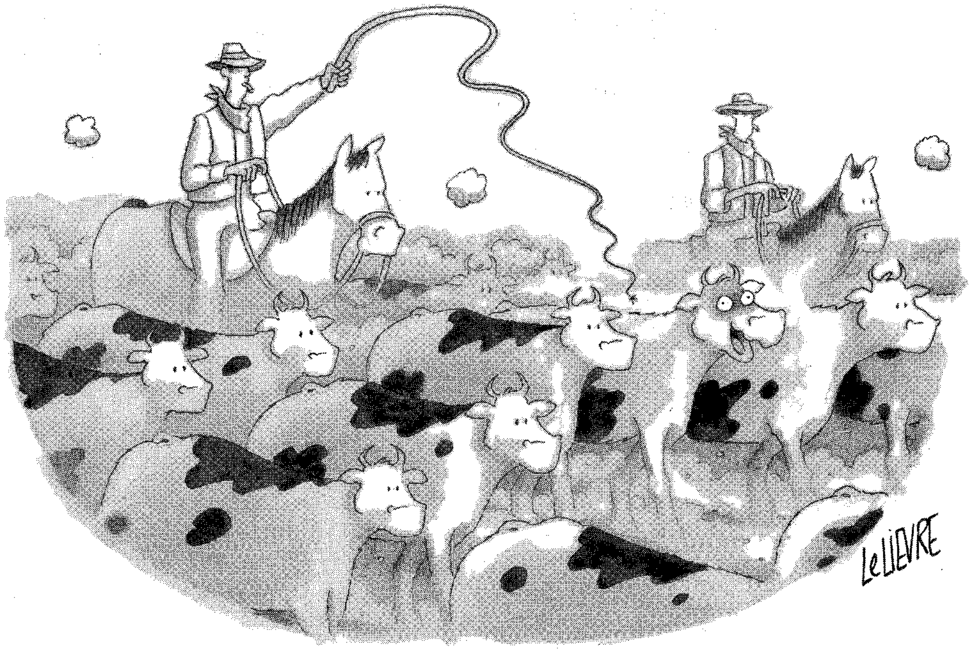




"It's the only exercise I get."

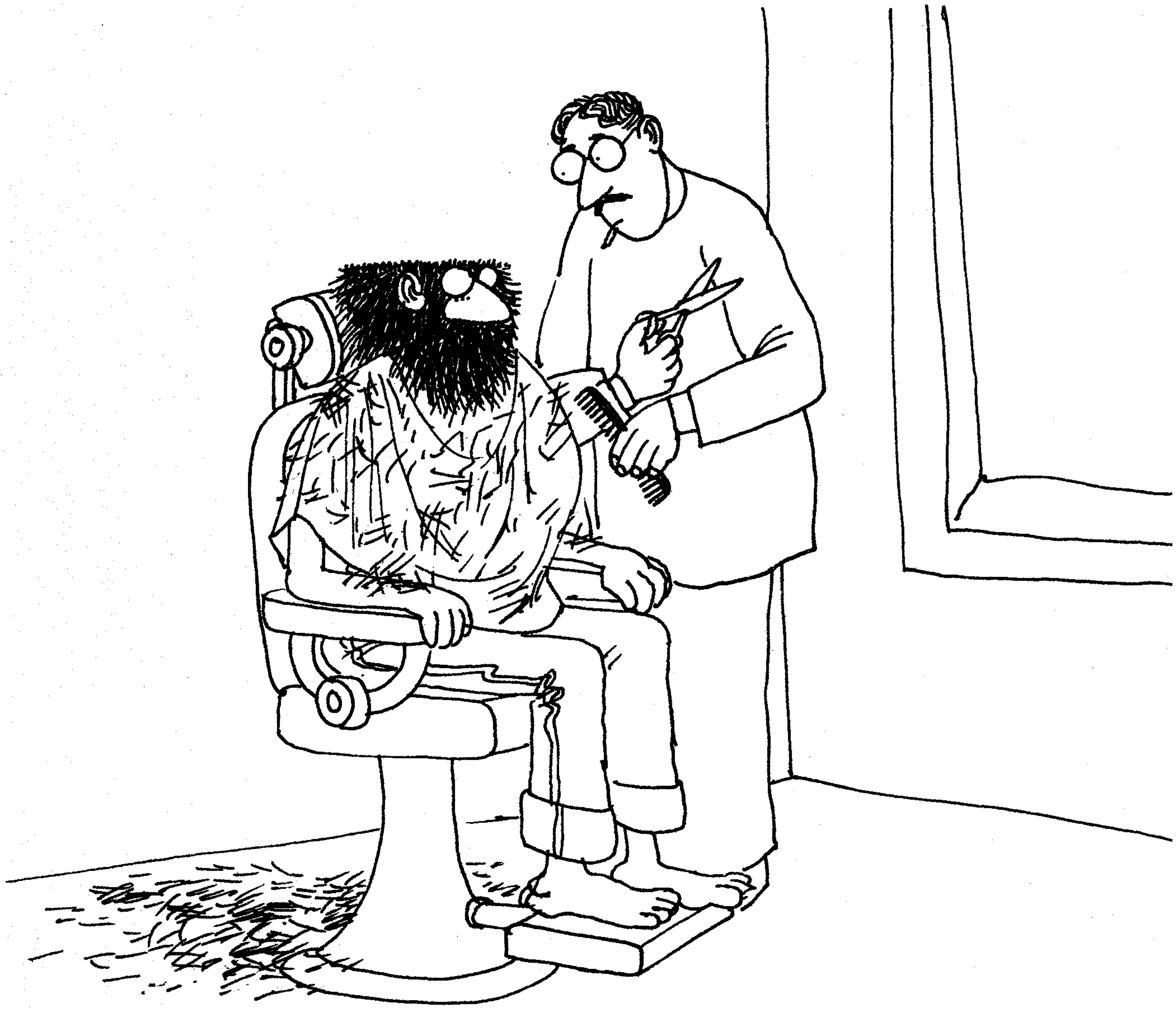


"And, on the lowest end of the caloric spectrum, we offer a leather chew toy."



"Oh God, yes! I've been a bad cow! Such a bad, naughty cow! Again! Yes!"

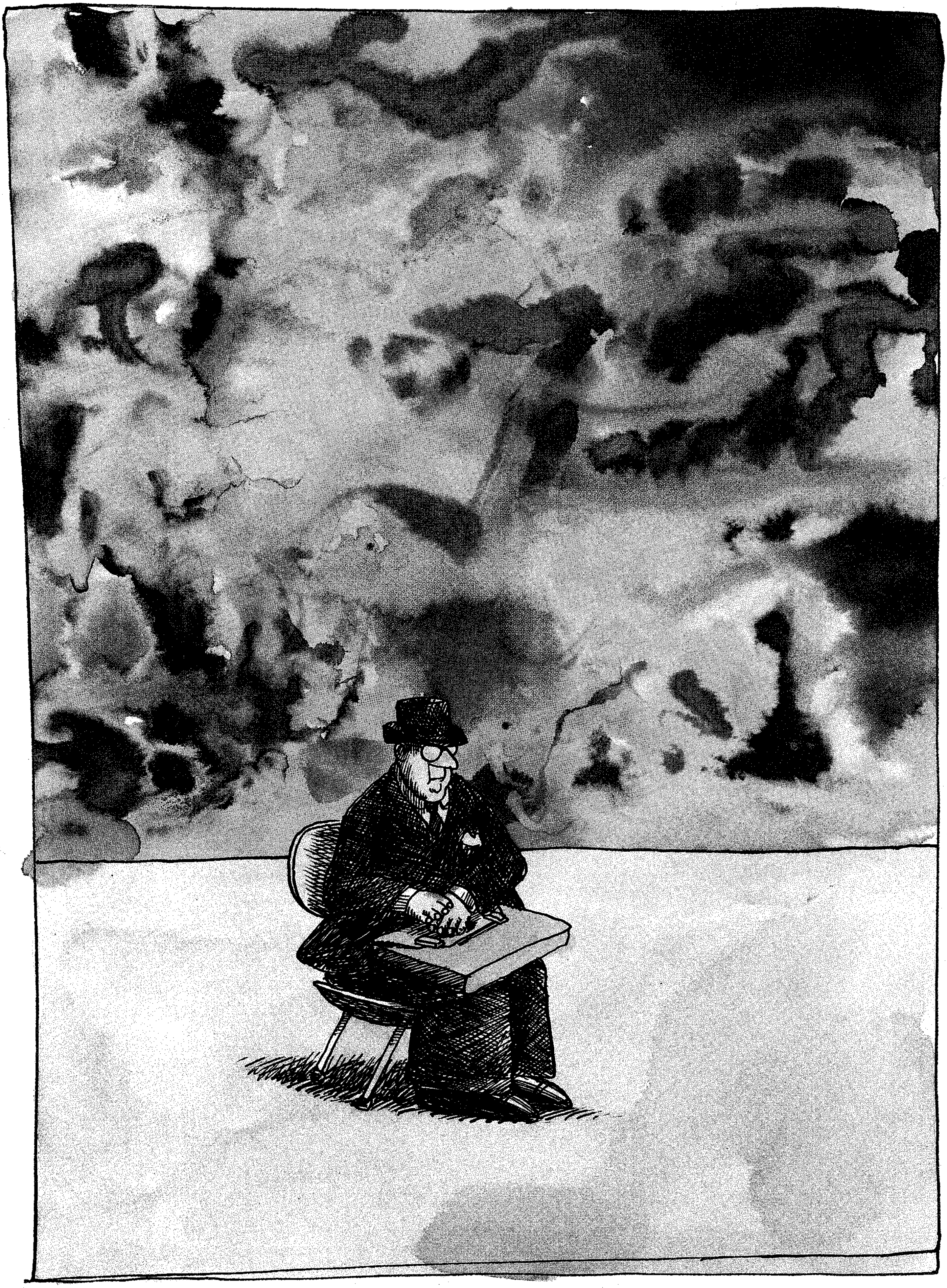
KLIBAN'S WORLD

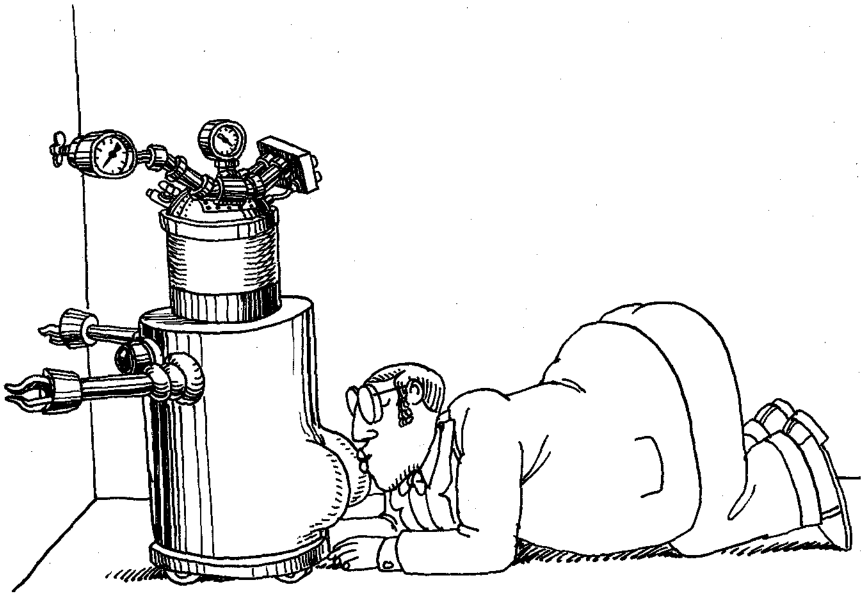


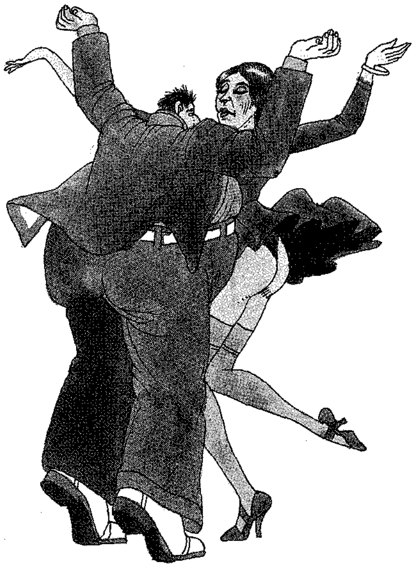
You could say that, for B. Kliban, it all began on the back of a cocktail napkin, but that would be too simple. By the time, in the late fifties, that he rode a motorcycle to California and began sketching showgirls at a nudie bar called the Mr. Wonderful Club, Kliban was a skilled painter and draftsman. He had bummed around Europe, whiled away weeks at the Uffizi, and fallen in and out of love with just about every Old Master. But classicism wasn't his calling. "I'd love to see a fine painting by Titian or Leonardo that was really silly—a Venus with false nose and glasses and duck feet," he said.

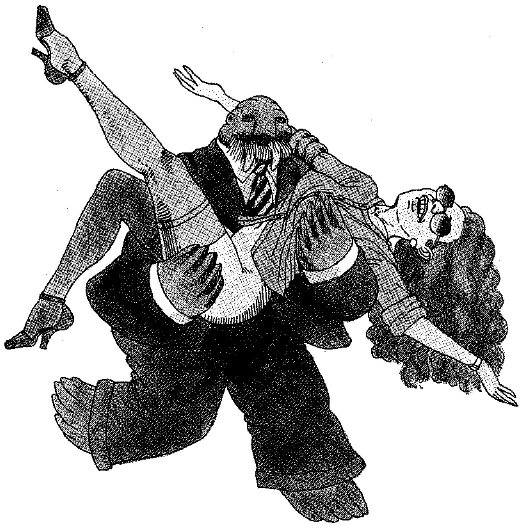
Kliban revelled in the incongruous: amorous octopi, robots with buttocks, a man whose barber mistook his head for a hedge. Not everybody got it. (This magazine published him once, in 1963; he contributed to *Playboy* and *National Lampoon* more frequently and issued ten books. The work in this portfolio is previously unpublished.) By the time he died, in 1990, he had become famous for his drawings of whimsical cats—and the many mugs and magnets they adorned—but perhaps his greater legacy is as a pioneer of a proudly absurdist strain of the single-panel cartoon. No captions, no gags, no concessions to artistic or comedic convention. The delight is his, and then yours. He liked to draw weird things. ♦

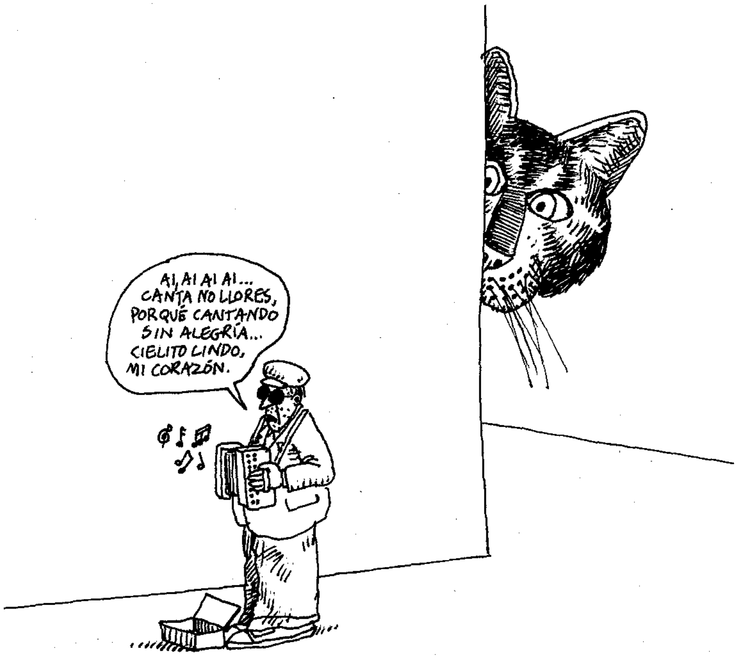
© JUDITH K. KLIBAN

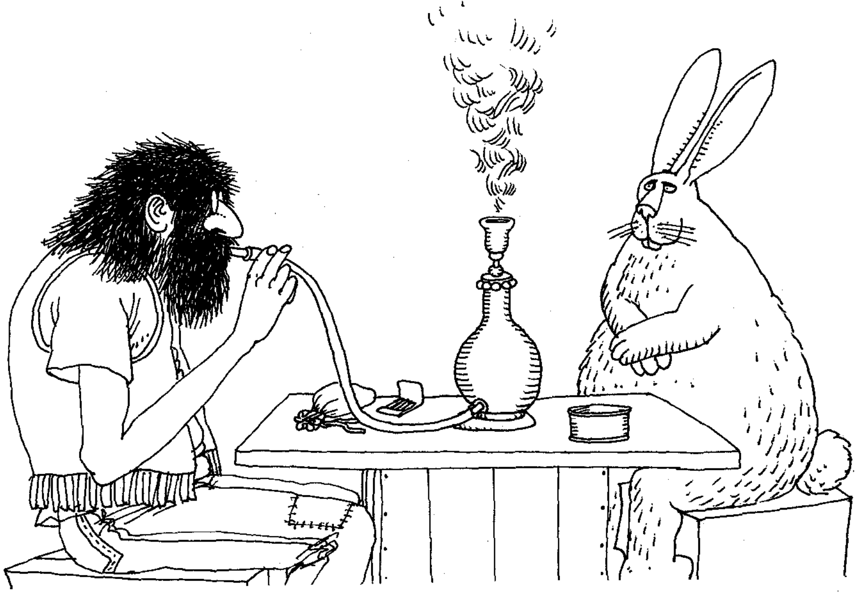


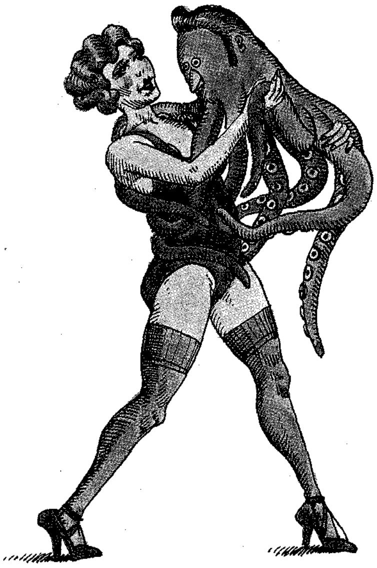


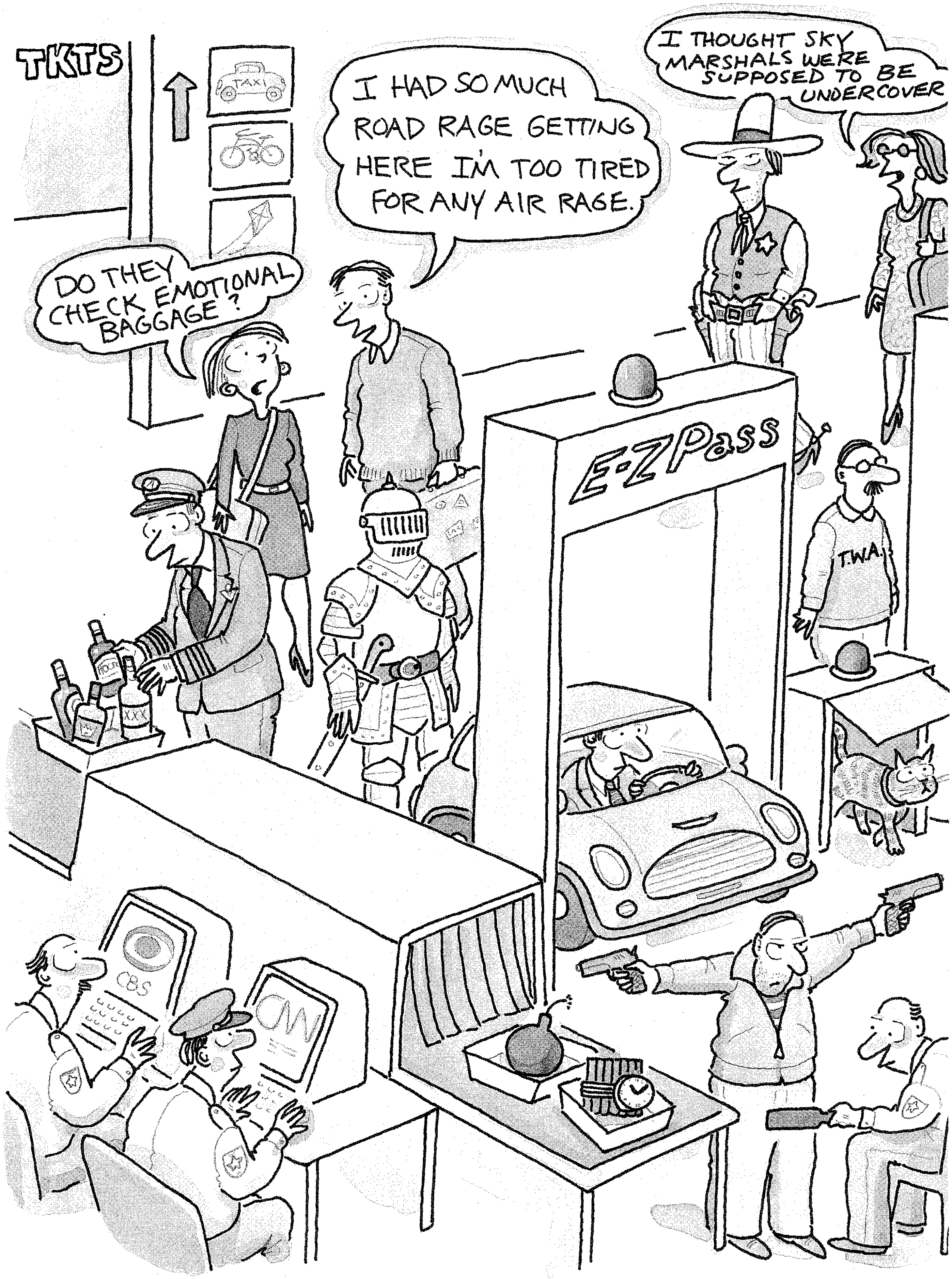


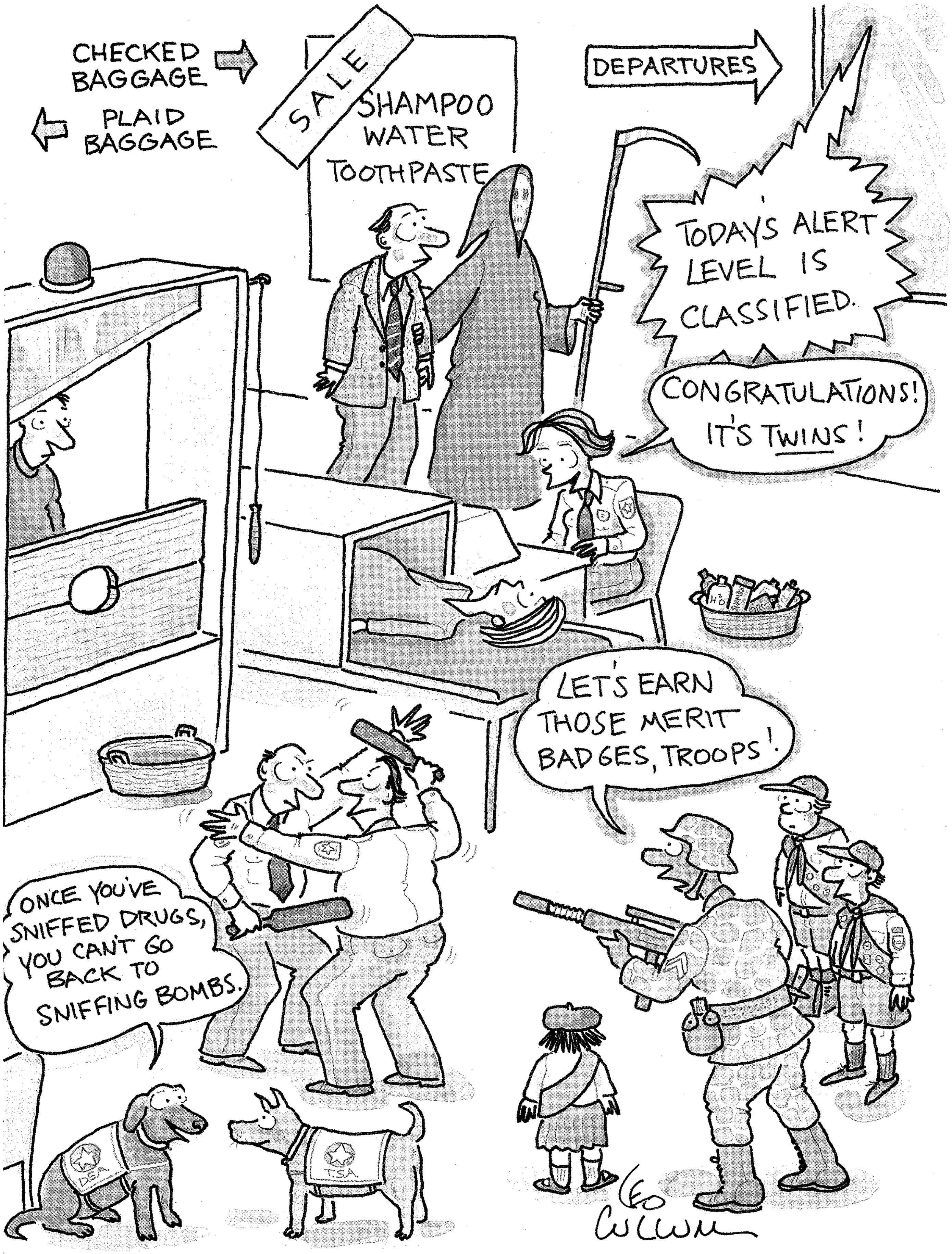



AI, AI AI AI...
CANTA NO LLORES,
PORQUÉ CANTANDO
SIN ALEGRÍA...
CIELITO LINDO,
MI CORAZÓN.





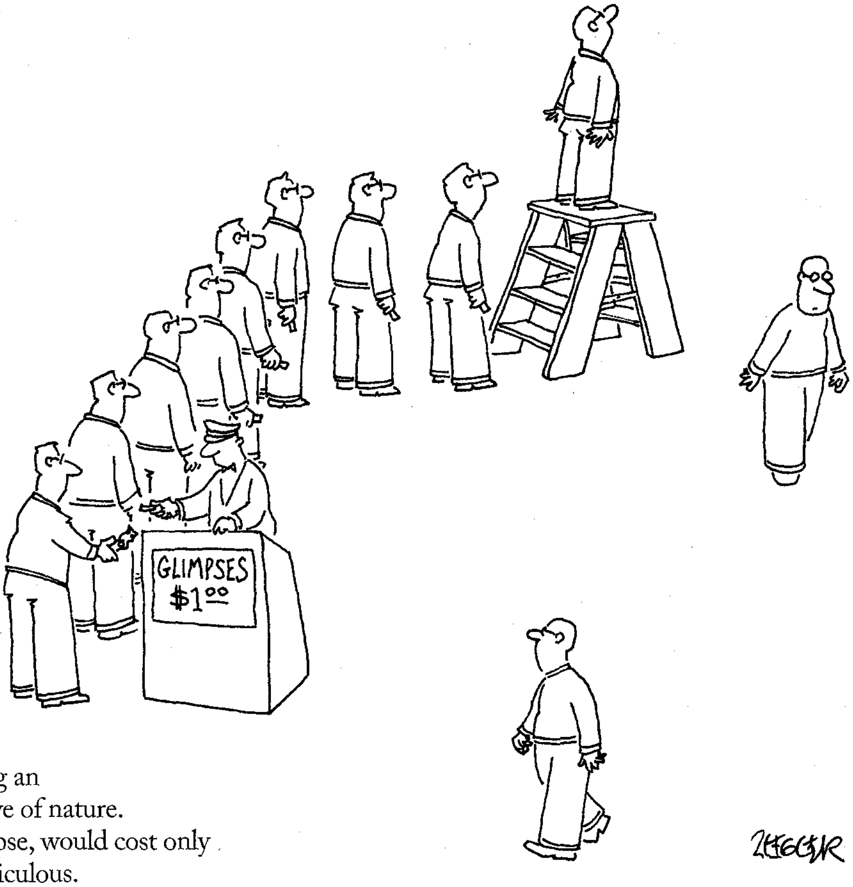

TKTS
TAXI
DO THEY CHECK EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE?
I HAD SO MUCH ROAD RAGE GETTING HERE I'M TOO TIRED FOR ANY AIR RAGE.
I THOUGHT SKY MARSHALS WERE SUPPOSED TO BE UNDERCOVER
E-ZPass
T.W.A.
XXX
CBS
CNN


CHECKED BAGGAGE
PLAID BAGGAGE
SALE
SHAMPOO WATER TOOTHPASTE
DEPARTURES
TODAY'S ALERT LEVEL IS CLASSIFIED.
CONGRATULATIONS! IT'S TWINS!
LET'S EARN THOSE MERIT BADGES, TROOPS!
ONCE YOU'VE SNIFFED DRUGS, YOU CAN'T GO BACK TO SNIFFING BOMBS.
DEA
T.S.A.
Leo Cullum

CARTOON I.Q. TEST

I DON'T GET IT

From time to time, we print a cartoon that readers deem obscure or confusing. It is not our objective to baffle; indeed, to do so would violate the cartoonist's vow to "edify, enlighten, and amuse." To make amends, we hereby endeavor to explain a few cartoons that have caused widespread consternation. We don't want to make things too easy, though, so for each cartoon we have thrown in three red herrings.



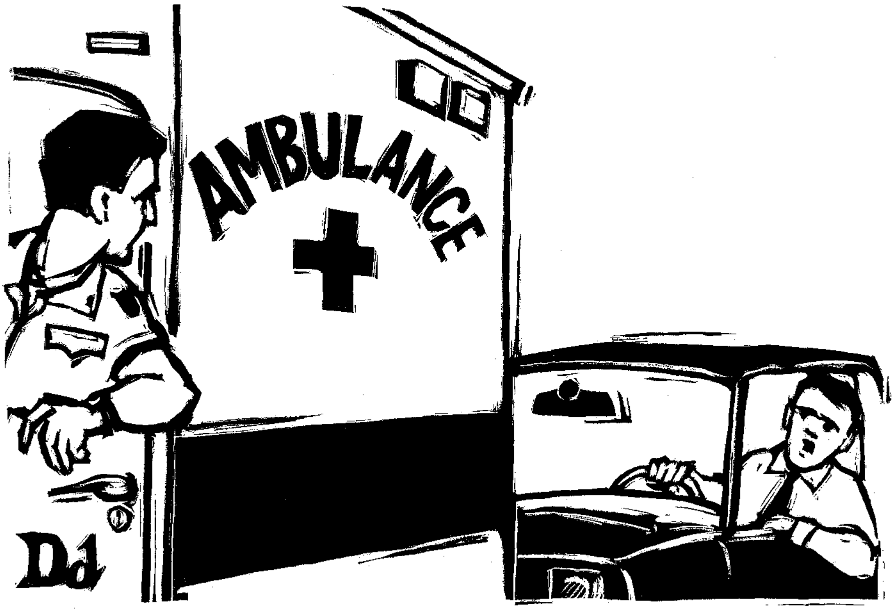
1)

A. Eleven identical convicts are plotting an escape predicated on a purported love of nature.

B. The idea that anything, even a glimpse, would cost only one dollar in our time is patently ridiculous.

C. The ladder is comically short—one would need at least a ten-to-twelve-foot ladder to get a good glimpse of the moon, which is very far away.

D. People will pay a dollar to do anything.



"I'm not a lawyer. I'm just drafting."

2)

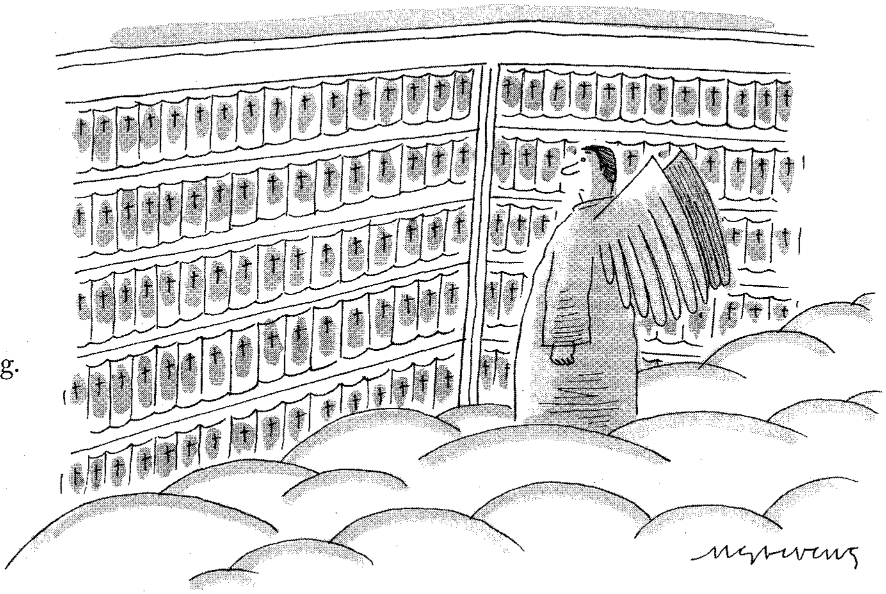
A. Having been mistaken for an ambulance chaser, the driver of the car explains that he is, in fact, following the larger vehicle to minimize wind resistance.

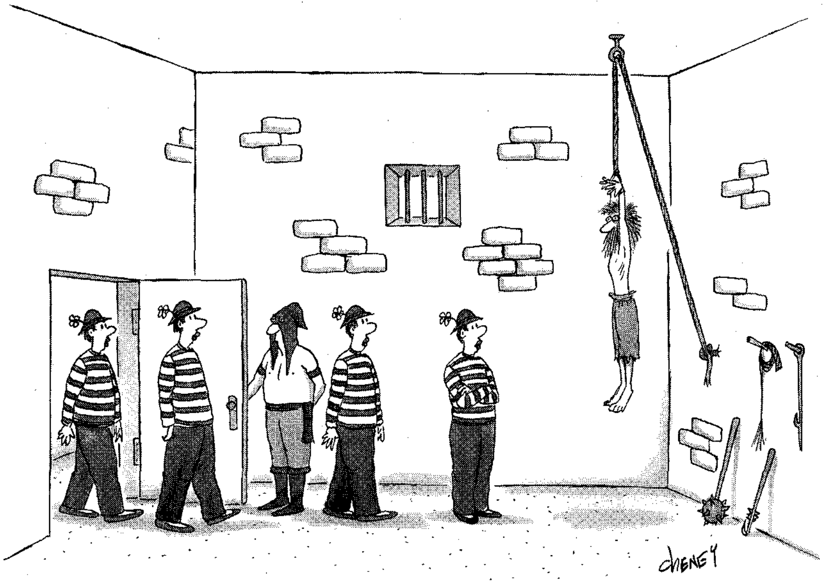
B. The ambulance driver has taken a wrong turn and is now in the middle of a racetrack for station wagons.

C. The driver of the car follows ambulances in order to draft athletes for the Broken-Arm Olympics.

D. Once a lawyer, always a lawyer.

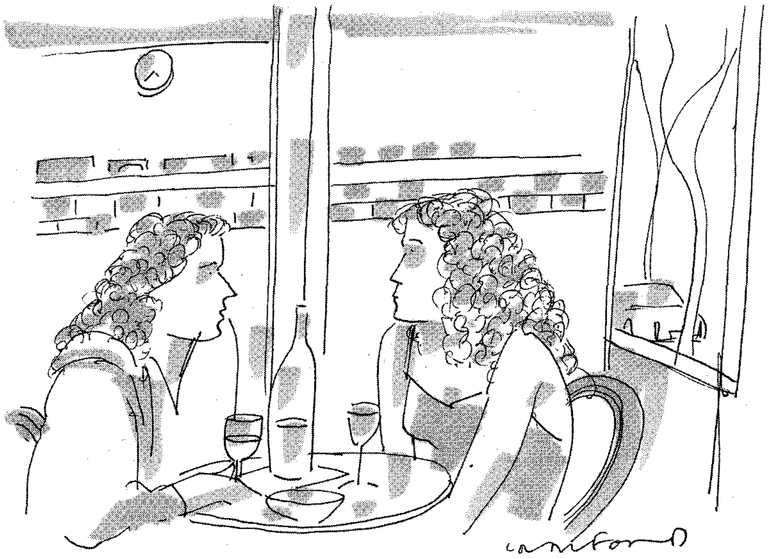
3)
A. In Heaven's library one finds only Bibles.
B. In Heaven's library one finds only caskets.
C. Someone has scratched the writing off the spines of all the books and carved the initial "T" into the binding. That someone? Thomas, Heaven's vandal.
D. The angel cannot read.





4)
A. Mimes, long ridiculed, are finally imprisoned.
B. These mimes belong to a very disorganized union.
C. While mimes don't talk, they have ways of making you talk.
D. This cartoon reflects the opinion that the international monitors who visited Guantánamo Bay were little better than mimes at reporting the outrages they witnessed.

5)
A. The caption is supposed to read "cuticle." She would not date her manicurist, but she admires his craftsmanship.
B. A man gives "cubicle," a woman gives "desk."
C. These women have ordered only wine and no food. Small wonder that they are now unclear on the meanings and usage of words.
D. Within the arid confines of office culture, he's a fun guy.

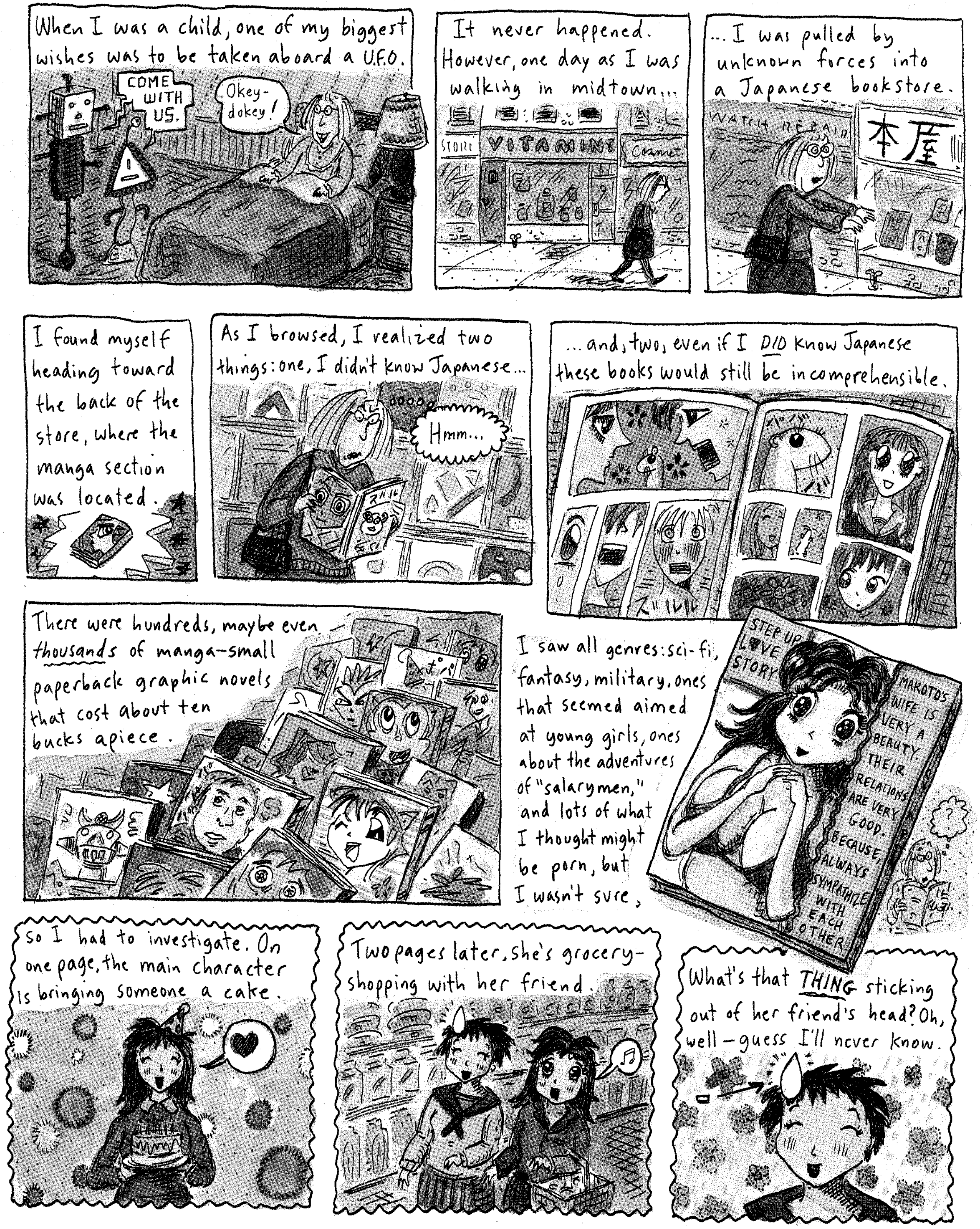


"I'd never go out with him, but he does give great cubicle."

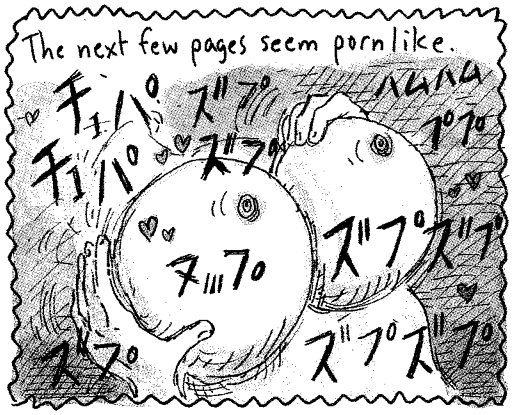
ZIEGLER, 2/9/2004; DERNAVICH, 2/13/2006 & 2/20/2006; STEVENS, 6/12/2006; CHENEY, 2/2/2004; CRAWFORD, 2/6/2006

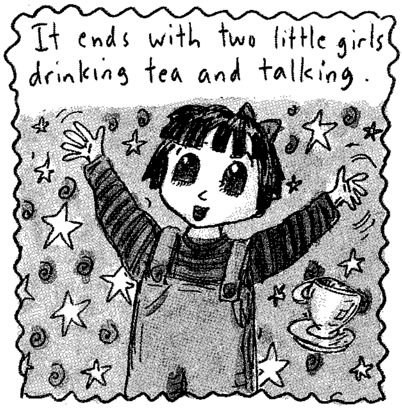
Answers: (1) D, (2) A, (3) A, (4) C, (5) D.

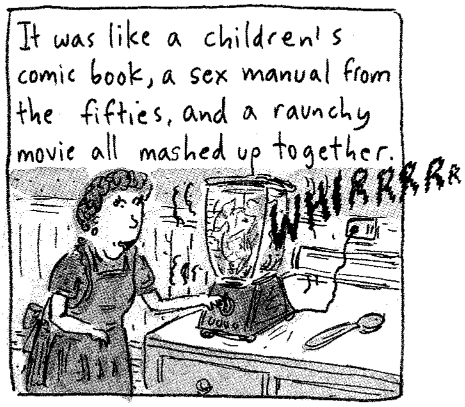
TURNING JAPANESE,

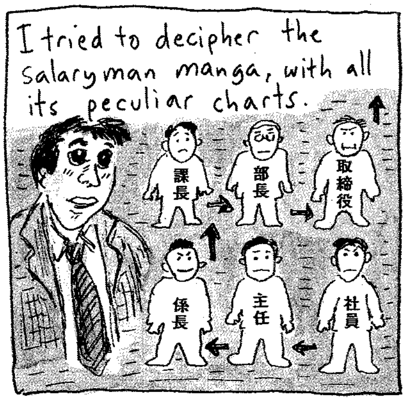

When I was a child, one of my biggest wishes was to be taken aboard a U.F.O.
COME WITH US.
Okey-dokey!
It never happened. However, one day as I was walking in midtown...
STORE
VITAMINS
Cosmet
...I was pulled by unknown forces into a Japanese bookstore.
WATCH REPAIR
本屋
I found myself heading toward the back of the store, where the manga section was located.
As I browsed, I realized two things: one, I didn't know Japanese...
Hmm...
スリル
...and, two, even if I DID know Japanese these books would still be incomprehensible.
There were hundreds, maybe even thousands of manga—small paperback graphic novels that cost about ten bucks apiece.
I saw all genres: sci-fi, fantasy, military, ones that seemed aimed at young girls, ones about the adventures of "salarymen," and lots of what I thought might be porn, but I wasn't sure.
STEP UP LOVE STORY
MAKOTO'S WIFE IS VERY A BEAUTY. THEIR RELATIONS ARE VERY GOOD. BECAUSE, ALWAYS SYMPATHIZE WITH EACH OTHER.
So I had to investigate. On one page, the main character is bringing someone a cake.
Two pages later, she's grocery-shopping with her friend.
What's that THING sticking out of her friend's head? Oh, well—guess I'll never know.

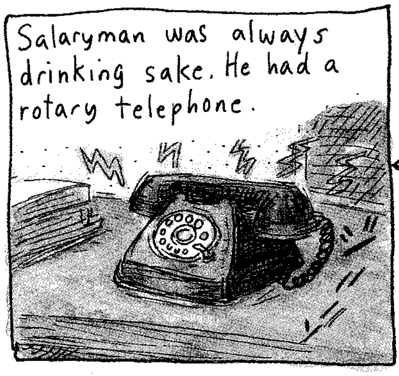
I REALLY THINK SO.

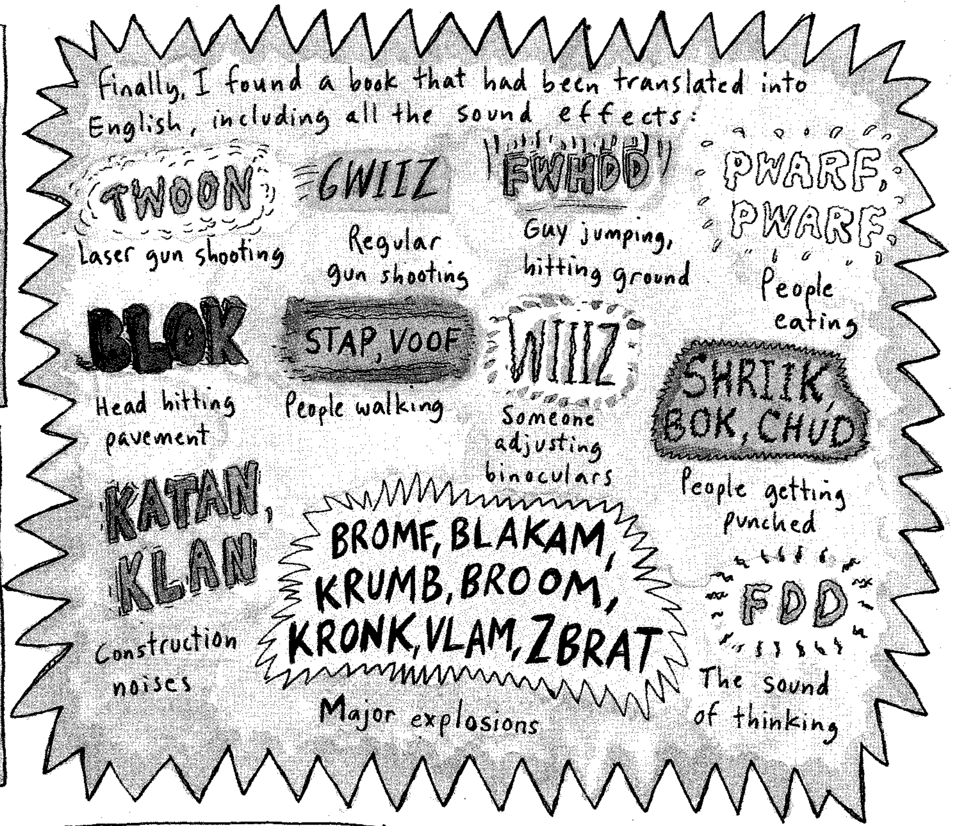

The next few pages seem porn like.
チュパ
チュパ
ズプ
ズプ
ハムハム
プププ
ヌップ
ズプズプ
ズプズプ
ズプ

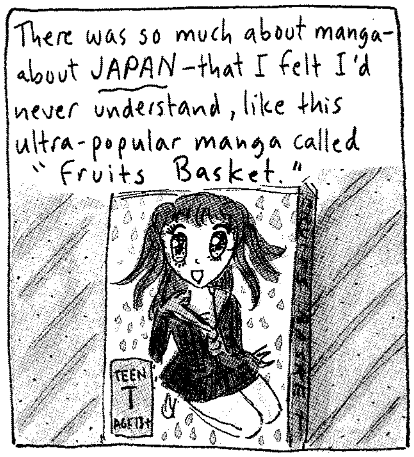

It ends with two little girls drinking tea and talking.

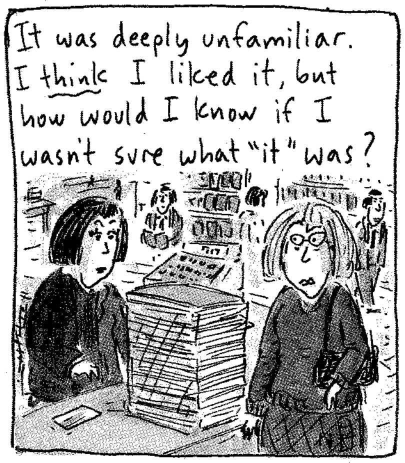

It was like a children's comic book, a sex manual from the fifties, and a raunchy movie all mashed up together.
WHIRRRRRR

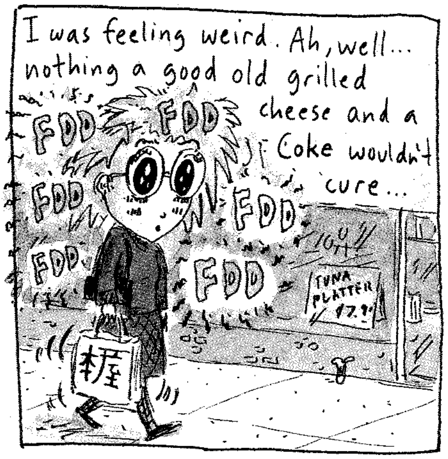

I tried to decipher the salaryman manga, with all its peculiar charts.
課長
部長
取締役
係長
主任
社員


Salaryman was always drinking sake. He had a rotary telephone.


Finally, I found a book that had been translated into English, including all the sound effects:
TWOON
Laser gun shooting
GWIIZ
Regular gun shooting
FWHDD
Guy jumping, hitting ground
PWARF, PWARF,
People eating
BLOK
Head hitting pavement
STAP, VOOF
People walking
WIIIZ
Someone adjusting binoculars
SHRIIK, BOK, CHUD
People getting punched
KATAN, KLAN
Construction noises
BROMF, BLAKAM, KRUMB, BROOM, KRONK, VLAM, ZBRAT
Major explosions
FDD
The sound of thinking

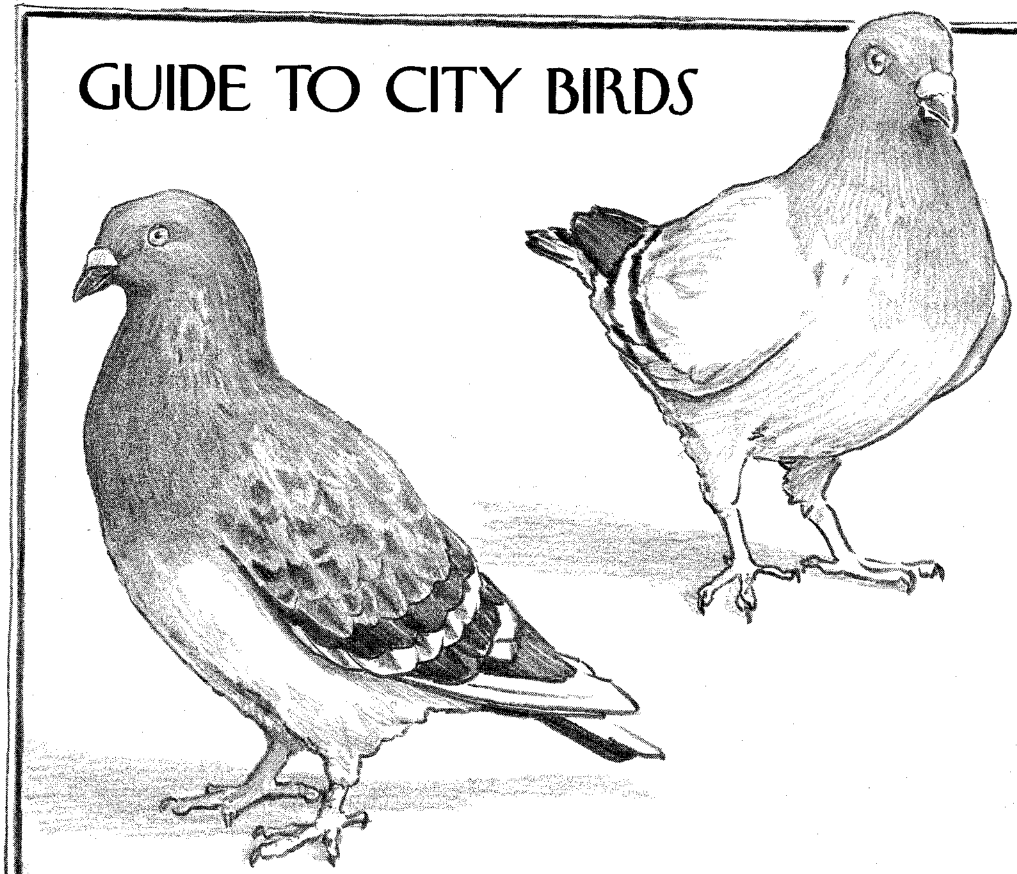

There was so much about manga—about JAPAN—that I felt I'd never understand, like this ultra-popular manga called "Fruits Basket."
TEEN
T
AGE 13+


It was deeply unfamiliar. I think I liked it, but how would I know if I wasn't sure what "it" was?


I was feeling weird. Ah, well... nothing a good old grilled cheese and a Coke wouldn't cure...
FDD
FDD
FDD
FDD
FDD
FDD
TUNA PLATTER 17.95

R. Chast

GUIDE TO CITY BIRDS



JENNIFER HERNANDEZ ROCK DOVE (PIGEON)

Likes: Outdoor movies at Bryant Park

Dislikes: Car alarms

About me: Not much to tell, really. I live on Staten Island with my three brothers and eighteen sisters.

Favorite New York Moment: Sitting on top of the Empire State Building with my fiancé at the time. We shared a French fry and just sat and talked from sunset till sunrise. It's such a beautiful city to be in love in. I'm not in a relationship at the moment, but I'm always hopeful.

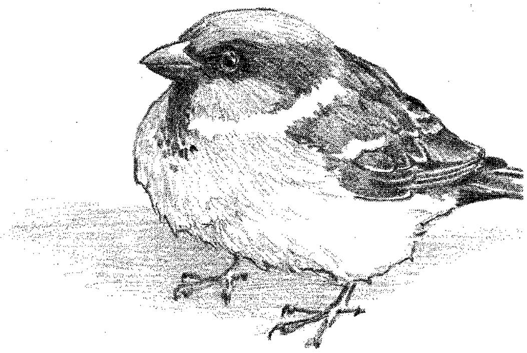
JAMAL OSGOOD, ROCK DOVE (PIGEON)

Likes: Wind

Dislikes: Falcons

About me: I broke a wing in a cab accident when I was a kid and it never really healed right. I can't fly anymore. I can glide for short distances if I can get to a high enough takeoff point, but it's not that bad, really. In the city, you can walk pretty much everywhere.

Favorite New York Moment: I guess it would be all the times that I was flying, back in the day. I used to be really fast, you know, until the one time I wasn't. It sort of sucks.



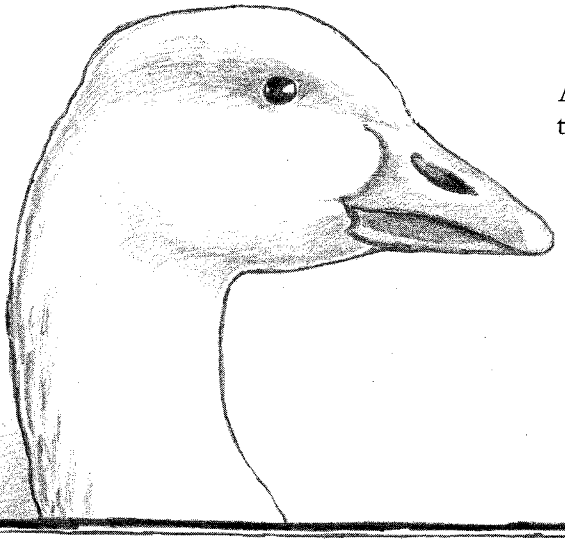
JOSH EVERETT, SNOW GOOSE

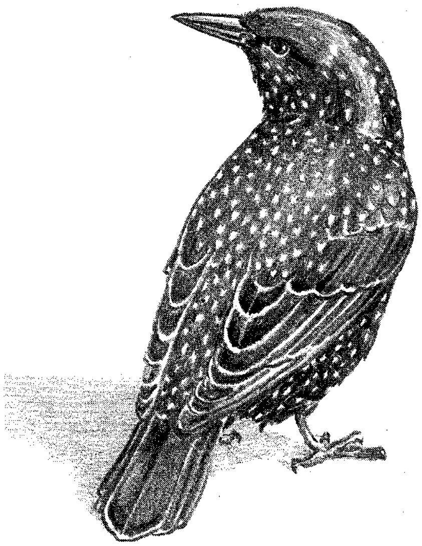
Likes: Travel, good food

Dislikes: Negative attitudes

About me: I came here on a southbound stopover in '99. We spent the night in Central Park. Next morning, I got distracted watching a Zamboni and got left behind. I was young then and didn't know what to do, but a couple of swans helped me out. Swans have a reputation for being mean or whatever, but they've always been good to me. Tough but fair, you know?

Favorite New York Moment: I was flying over the East River one summer night with some pigeon friends of mine and all of a sudden there was this huge bang and flash of light. Turns out it was only fireworks, but for half a second I was having hunting flashbacks. Buddy of mine laughed so hard he almost hit a cable on the bridge. I haven't laughed that hard in years.





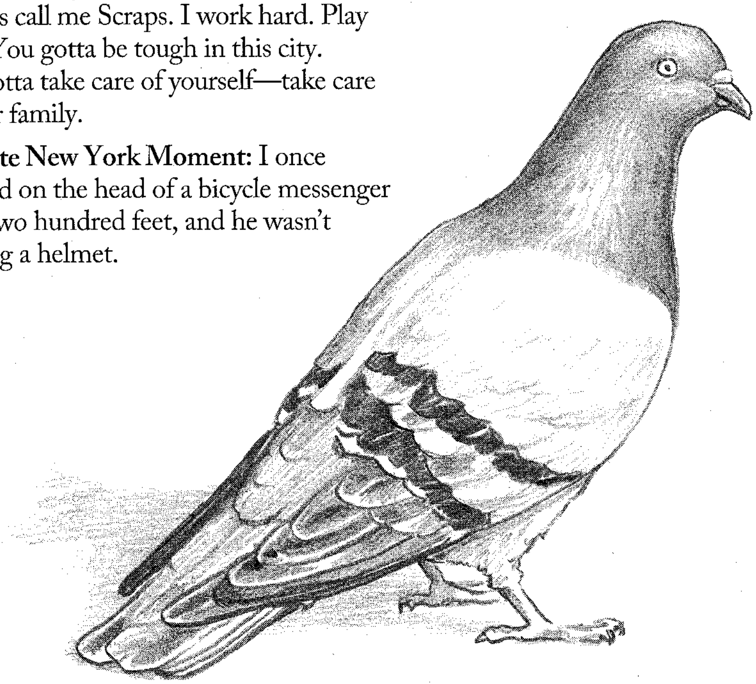
FRANK SCARPELLI, EUROPEAN STARLING

Likes: Pizza

Dislikes: I freakin' hate cats and tourists, and I've never been a big fan of birdbaths. I don't get the point, really.

About me: I grew up in the Bronx. Friends call me Scraps. I work hard. Play hard. You gotta be tough in this city. You gotta take care of yourself—take care of your family.

Favorite New York Moment: I once crapped on the head of a bicycle messenger from two hundred feet, and he wasn't wearing a helmet.



PHILIP DUNCAN
HOUSE SPARROW

Likes: Music, doughnuts, hanging out with friends

Dislikes: Cell phones, bullies, winter

About me: I'm small, but I'm quick. I'm originally from West Virginia. My family's still down there. It's beautiful, but I just love the city—the energy and the excitement. I think I'd get bored real fast with the whole rural thing.

Favorite New York Moment: I rode the F train once. It was a total accident. I was just hanging out in the station, looking for something to snack on, and I got rushed by a bunch of business-type guys. I guess I panicked. Anyway, I found myself flying laps in a subway car for a couple stops. Crazy.

HADLEY DANIELS, ROCK DOVE (PIGEON)

Likes: The usual stuff—bread and pretzels, flying against traffic in the Lincoln Tunnel

Dislikes: Intolerance, greed

About me: I moved out to Brooklyn recently. Park Slope. I like it a lot. It's just a slower pace, more trees, not as many rats.

Favorite New York Moment: Paul Simon's 1991 concert in Central Park.

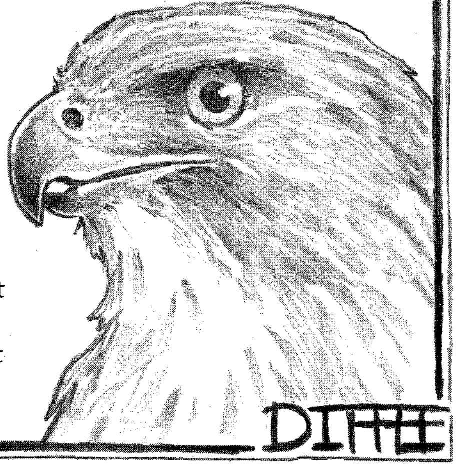
REGGIE WILKERSON (A.K.A. PALE MALE), RED-TAILED HAWK

Likes: Hunting, fishing, rats, my beautiful wife, Lola

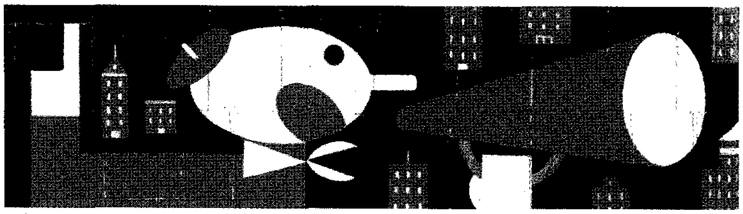
Dislikes: Damn paparazzi

About me: Jeez, what do you want to know that you don't already?

Favorite New York Moment: The whole nest-eviction saga was pretty hilarious. That Mary Tyler Moore's certainly a piece of work, though I have to say it was nice to get back. I love being near the Park.



THE CRITICS



BOOKS

DO THE MATH

Thomas Pynchon returns.

BY LOUIS MENAND

Thomas Pynchon is the apostle of imperfection, so it is arguably some sort of commendation to say that his new novel, "Against the Day" (Penguin; $35), is a very imperfect book. Imperfect not in the sense of "Ambitious but flawed." Imperfect in the sense of "What was he thinking?"

The book is set in the period between 1893 and around 1920, and this is the plot: An anarchist named Webb Traverse, who employs dynamite as a weapon against the mining and railroad interests out West, is killed by two gunmen, Deuce Kindred and Sloat Fresno, who were hired by the wicked arch-plutocrat Scarsdale Vibe. Traverse's sons—Kit, a mathematician; Frank, an engineer; and Reef, a cardsharp and ladies' man—set out to avenge their father's murder. (Webb also has a daughter, Lake, but she takes up with one of the killers.) This story requires a thousand and eighty-five pages to get told, or roughly the number of pages it took for Napoleon to invade Russia and be driven back by General Kutuzov. Of course, there are a zillion other things going on in "Against the Day," but the Traverse-family revenge drama is the only one that resembles a plot—that is, in Aristotle's helpful definition, an action that has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

The rest of the novel is shapeless, just yards and yards of Pynchonian wallpaper: fantastic invention, arcane reference, virtuosic prose. Elaborately imagined characters and incidents, from a man who may or may not be transformed into a jelly doughnut to a city beneath the desert and a near-death experience in a mayonnaise factory, pop up and disappear after a few pages, so many raisins in the enormous loaf. The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893; the mysterious collapse of the Campanile in the Piazza San Marco, in Venice, in 1902; the equally mysterious Tunguska Event, in 1908, in which roughly eight hundred square miles of Siberian forest was flattened, evidently by an exploding asteroid; the Mexican Revolution; and the troubles in the Balkans leading to the First World War all figure in the book's pages. Longer-running characters include the eternally youthful crew of a sometimes invisible airship, Inconvenience, who style themselves the Chums of Chance; initiates of a British spiritualist society called T.W.I.T.; a private eye named Lew Basnight; a glamorous mathematician named Yashmeen Halfcourt; and an itinerant photographer called Merle Rideout, his daughter, Dahlia, and his ex-wife, Erlys, who has run off with a magician named Zombini. Scenes are set in (among other places) Colorado, New York, Venice, Paris, Croatia, Macedonia, Mexico, various points in Asia, and Hollywood. Characters are given names like Alonzo Meatman, Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin, Professor Heino Vanderjuice, and the Reverend Lube Carnal. Pig Bodine, a recurring avatar who appeared in Pynchon's first novel, "V." (1963), puts in his ritual appearance. There is a literate dog, a machine for time travel, a "subdesertine frigate" for voyaging beneath desert sand, and assorted mad inventors, shamans, clairvoyants, terrorists, drop-dead-gorgeous women, and drug abusers. The whole thing sloshes along, alternately farcical and magniloquent, with threads left dangling everywhere, sometimes for hundreds of pages, ultimately forever. The novel doesn't conclude; it just, more or less arbitrarily, stops.

So what *was* Pynchon thinking? To begin with, he was apparently thinking what he usually thinks, which is that modern history is a war between utopianism and totalitarianism, counterculture and hegemony, anarchism and corporatism, nature and *techne*, Eros and the death drive, slaves and masters, entropy and order, and that the only reasonably good place to be in such a world, given that you cannot be outside of it, is between the extremes. "Those whose enduring object is power in this world are only too happy to use without remorse the others, whose aim is of course to transcend all questions of power. Each regards the other as a pack of deluded fools," as one of the book's innumerable walk-ons, a Professor Svegli of the University of Pisa, puts it. Authorial sympathy in Pynchon's novels always lies on the "transcend all questions of power," countercultural side of the struggle; that's where the good guys—the oddballs, dropouts, and hapless dreamers—tend to gather. But his books also dramatize the perception that resistance to domination can develop into its own regime of domination. The tendency of extremes is to meet, and perfection in life is a false Grail, a foreclosure of possibility, a kind of death. Of binaries beware.

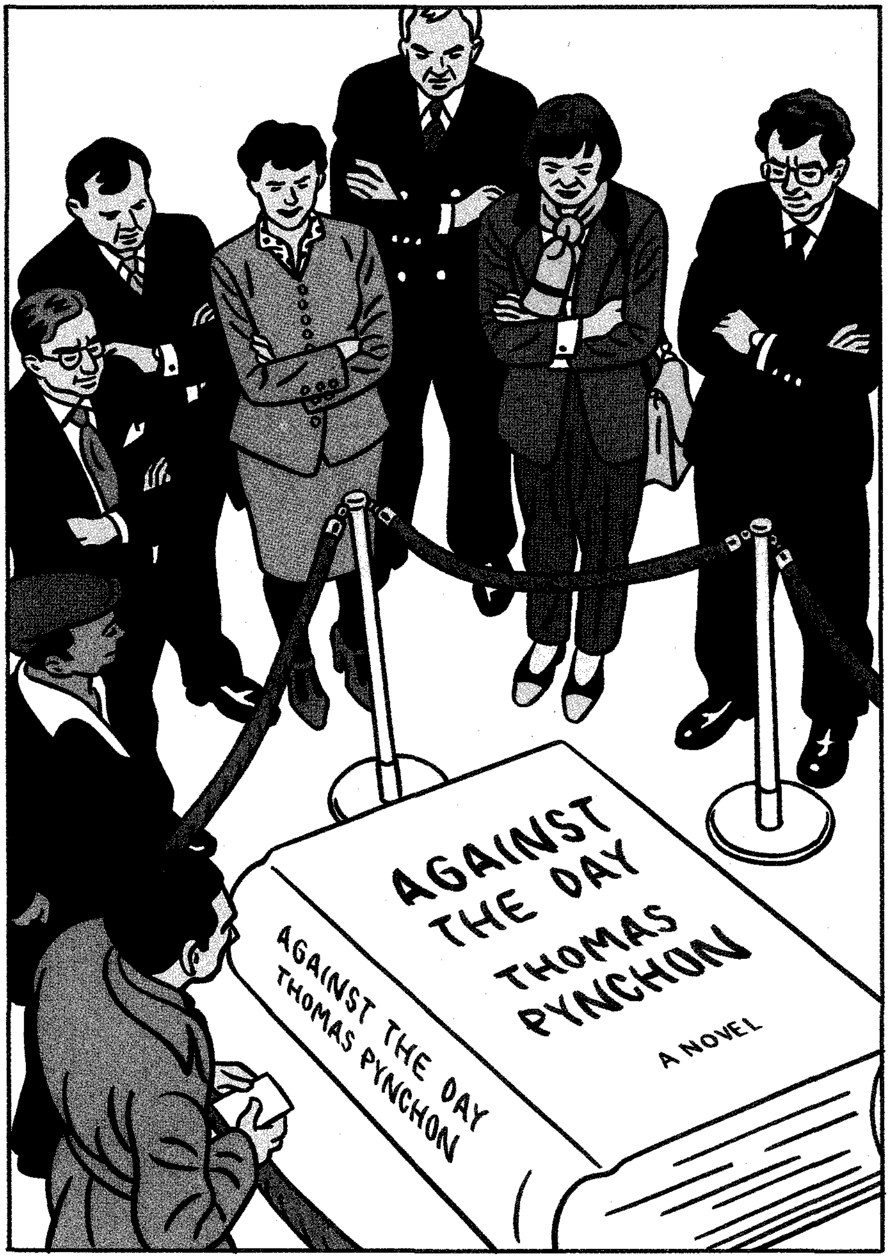
Pynchon has an interest in military and political history (also in sexual practices that are more fun to read about than one imagines they would be, for most of his audience, to engage in). His special interest, though, is science, about which he knows a great deal—whether what he knows is accurate or not doesn't matter: he's a novelist—and toward which he maintains the ambivalence implied by his over-all view of history. Science is either a method of disenchantment and control or it is a window onto possible worlds: it all depends on the application. In Pynchon's last novel, "Mason & Dixon" (1997), in which the protagonists were eighteenth-century surveyors, the relevant science was astronomy. In "Against the Day," it is mathematics, specifically, the mathematics associated with electromagnetism, mechanics, and optics—with electric light, the movies, and, eventually, weapons of mass destruction. In "Against the Day," as in "Gravity's Rainbow" (1973), there are hints, throughout the book, of apocalypse, end-of-the-species images of masses crowding toward their doom.

Thus readers will encounter many references to, and, frequently, extended disquisitions on, such matters as Hamilton's Quaternions, Gibbsian vector analysis, Riemann spheres, Prandtl's discovery of the boundary layer, the Hilbert Pólya Conjecture, the Minkowskian space-time track, and Zermelo's Axiom of Choice. Inserting this stuff into novelistic situations produces passages like this one, describing a meeting of an outfit known as the Transnoctial Discussion Group (which never appears again in the book):

> "Time moves on but one axis," advised Dr. Blope, "past to future—the only turnings possible being turns of a hundred and eighty degrees. In the Quaternions, a ninety-degree direction would correspond to an *additional axis* whose unit is $\sqrt{-1}$. A turn through any other angle would require for its unit a complex number."
>
> "Yet mappings in which a linear axis becomes curvilinear—functions of a complex variable such as $w=e^z$, where a straight line in the z-plane maps to a circle in the w-plane," said Dr. Rao, "do suggest the possibility of linear time becoming circular, and so achieving eternal return as simply, or should I say complexly, as that."... As if the hour itself in growing later had exposed some obscure fatality, the discussion moved to the subject of the luminiferous Æther, as to which exchanges of opinion—relying, like Quaternions, largely on faith—often failed to avoid a certain vehemence.
>
> "Bloody idiots!" screamed Dr. Blope, who belonged to that British school, arisen in the wake of the Michelson-Morley Experiment, of belief in some secret Agency in Nature which was conspiring to prevent all measurement of the Earth's velocity through the Æther. If such velocity produced, as Fitzgerald maintained, a shrinkage of dimension in the same direction, it was impossible to measure it, because the measuring device would shrink as well. "It's obvious Something doesn't want us to know!"

And on into the night.

I can't do the math, but I think that the idea behind "Against the Day" is something like this: An enormous technological leap occurred in the decades around 1900. This advance was fired by some mixed-up combination of abstract mathematical speculation, capitalist greed, global geopolitical power struggle, and sheer mysticism. We know (roughly) how it all turned out, but if we had been living in those years it would have been impossible to sort out the fantastical possibilities from the plausible ones. Maybe we *could* split time and be in two places at once, or travel backward and forward at will, or maintain parallel lives in parallel universes. It turns out (so far) that we can't. But we did split the atom—an achievement that must once have seemed equally far-fetched. "Against the Day" is a kind of inventory of the possibilities inherent in a particular moment in the history of the imagination. It is like a work of science fiction written in 1900. What makes the book less compelling than it might otherwise be is that this was exactly the formula for "Mason & Dixon" (which clocked in at a mere seven hundred and seventy-three pages). It's a little like a card trick you've already seen—it's still hard to figure out how he does it, but you know the moves.



At a thousand-odd pages, Pynchon's novel comes off like a pastiche of a Pynchon novel.

FLOCH

Of course, all of Pynchon's novels—with the exception of the novel that people who read only one Pynchon novel read, "The Crying of Lot 49" (1966), about which Pynchon himself has been dismissive—are long, rambling, multilayered, underplotted, quasi-unfinished monsters. But with this one there is the feeling that the magician has fallen in love with his own stunts, as though Pynchon were composing a pastiche of a Pynchon novel. Bravura Pynchonian paragraphs

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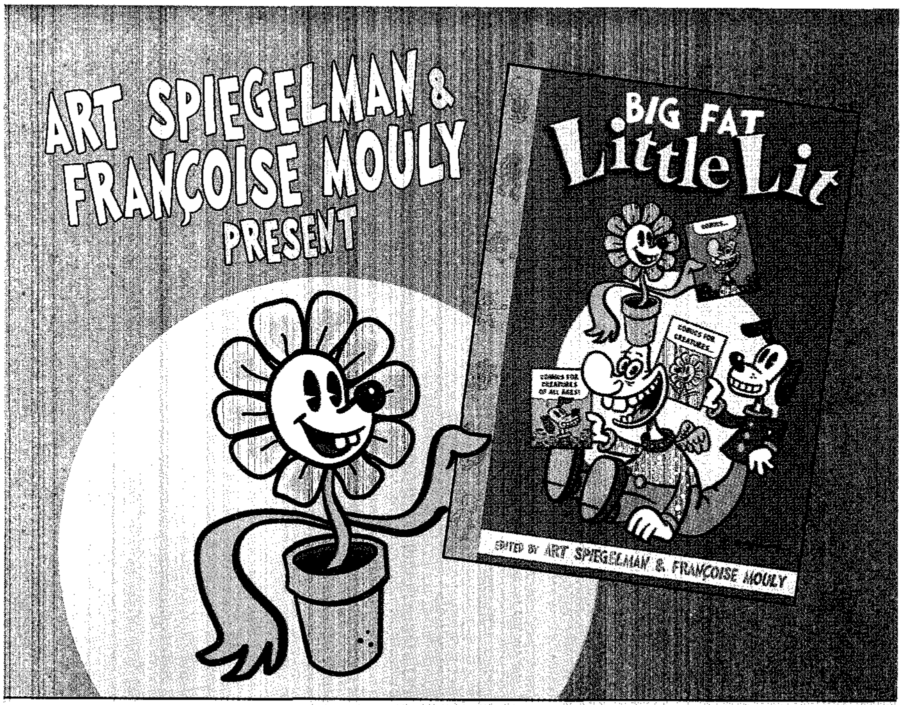
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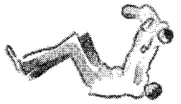

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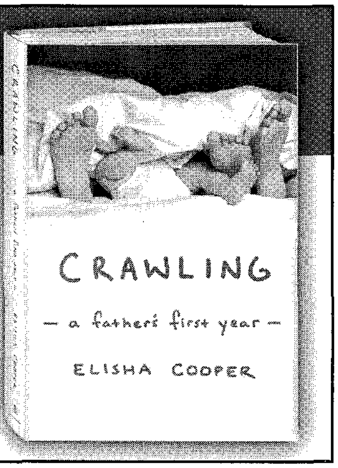

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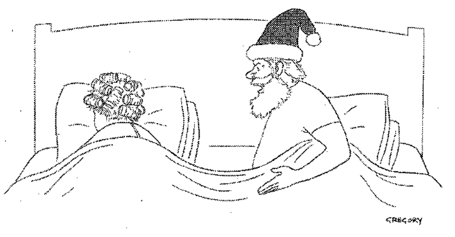

"Stop avoiding me. I know when you are sleeping. I know when you're awake."

Alex Gregory 2001

sometimes seem to be setups for goofy Pynchonian jokes. In a typically brief but ornately detailed episode, Kit Traverse meets one of the novel's drop-dead-gorgeous women (one Pléiade Lafrisée) in a Belgian café:

> The place was like a museum of mayonnaise. This being just at the height of the *culte de la mayonnaise* then sweeping Belgium, oversize exhibits of the ovoöleaginous emulsion were to be encountered at every hand. Heaps of Mayonnaise Grenache, surrounded by plates of smoked turkey and tongue, glowed redly as if from within, while with less, if any, reference to actual food it might have been there to modify, mountains of Chantilly mayonnaise, swept upward in gravity-impervious peaks insubstantial as cloud, along with towering masses of green mayonnaise, basins of boiled mayonnaise, mayonnaise baked into soufflés, not to mention a number of not entirely successful mayonnaises, under some obscure attainder, or on occasion passing as something else, dominated every corner.
>
> "How much do you know of La Mayonnaise?" she inquired.
>
> He shrugged. "Maybe up to the part that goes '*Aux armes, citoyens*'—"

Still, none of this is simple self-indulgence. From one point of view, perhaps a narrow one, there is an error of scale here. As we read, we are frustrated looking forward and forgetful looking backward—episodes open and fail satisfactorily to close, or, when they come back on line, we can no longer remember how they started. But compared with the hill in your back yard, Mt. Everest is an error of scale. The universe is an error of scale. Scale and form are functions of our capacity to perceive them. The preposterous length of the new book does include a vertiginous sensation, somewhat in the way of a "Where's Waldo?" cartoon: the text exceeds our ability to keep everything in our heads, to take it all in at once. There is too much going on among too many characters in too many places. There are also too many tonal shifts, as though Pynchon set out to mimic all the styles of popular fiction—boys' adventure stories, science fiction, Westerns, comic books, hardboiled crime fiction, spy novels, soft-core porn. There are echoes of L. Frank Baum, Louis L'Amour, Raymond Chandler, John le Carré, "Star Trek," and even Philip Pullman's children's trilogy "His Dark Materials." This was all surely part of the intention, a simulation of the disorienting overload of modern culture. As always, it's an amazing feat. Pynchon must have set out to make his readers dizzy and, in the process, become a little dizzy himself. ◆

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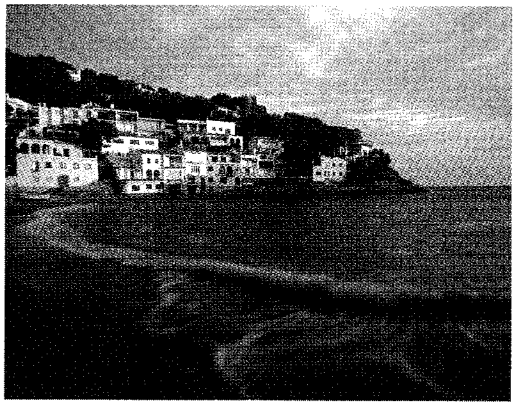
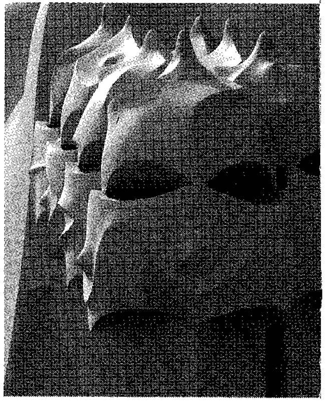
POSTMARK////

Barcelona





m ropolis on the Mediterranean

Along with London, Paris, and Rome, cosmopolitan Barcelona has emerged as one of Europe's must-see cities. Also an ideal jumping-off point to explore the fascinating region of Catalonia, this cultural capital draws lovers of art and architecture, food and music, modernism and the sea.

Beyond these virtues, Barcelona's history has long been part of its appeal. Its **Gothic Quarter** (or Barri Gòtic) is perhaps Europe's best-preserved medieval district, and portions of it even date back to the reign of the Roman emperor Augustus in the first century B.C. The charmingly preserved historic center houses the fourteenth-century **Barcelona Cathedral**, as well as the royal palace where Columbus was received by Ferdinand and Isabella upon his return from his first trip to America. Nearby cultural institutions include the **Picasso Museum**. The creative genius of native sons Joan Miró and Salvador Dali further underscores the passion and intellect of the Catalan spirit.

Yet it is the bold Art Nouveau works of Catalonia's premier architect Antonio Gaudí constructed a century ago that give the city its inimitable profile. From the ornate **Palau Güell**, just off Las Ramblas, the city's famous shopping promenade, to the epic, sinuous, albeit unfinished **Sagrada Familia** temple in the Eixample that can be seen for miles—Gaudí's artistry is synonymous with Barcelona.

Travelers savor twenty-first century Barcelona in its tapas restaurants where *cava*—Catalonia's sparkling wine—flows, and along the city's exciting new waterfront.

Montjuïc, one of Barcelona's famous hills, has been transformed into a popular destination thanks to distinctive museums—including the **National Art Museum of Catalonia** and **Fundació Joan Miró**—along with numerous galleries, night clubs, an open-air theatre, parkland, and the stadium and sports facilities used during the 1992 Olympics.

Sophisticated Barcelona welcomes guests at outstanding five-star hotels. The **Gran Hotel La Florida**, which first opened in 1925, recently underwent a nearly fifty-million-dollar transformation. One of the finest hotels in Europe, **Hotel Arts Barcelona**, is a contemporary Ritz-Carlton property boasting unsurpassed views of the city and the sparkling Mediterranean Sea beyond.

THEN AND NOW. *The Catalonia region that includes Barcelona is bordered by the Pyrenees and the Mediterranean. Secluded coves, fishing villages, and luxe resorts dot the rugged* ***Costa Brava****. The river town of* ***Girona*** *is lined with pastel-hued buildings; its fifteenth-century cathedral in the old quarter is known for its massive Gothic nave, the widest in the history of the architectural style. Once key to the Roman Empire,* ***Osona's*** *preserved sixteenth-century baroque university and some exquisite mansions are must-visits for travelers.* ***Vic*** (Osona's capital), *once colonized by the Romans, boasts a second-century temple's remains along with thirty-five other churches. Today, it may be better known for its lively, twice-weekly market, held in a square surrounded by Gothic arches—a charming setting for many a chic bar and café.*

Six routes allow travelers to plan an exploration of Catalonia's vast trove of art and architecture. For details, go to okspain.org.

PHOTOS LEFT TO RIGHT: CALA SA TUNA, COSTA BRAVA ©ROLAND GERTH/ZEFA/CORBIS; GAUDI'S CASA MILA ©OLIVIA BERNARD

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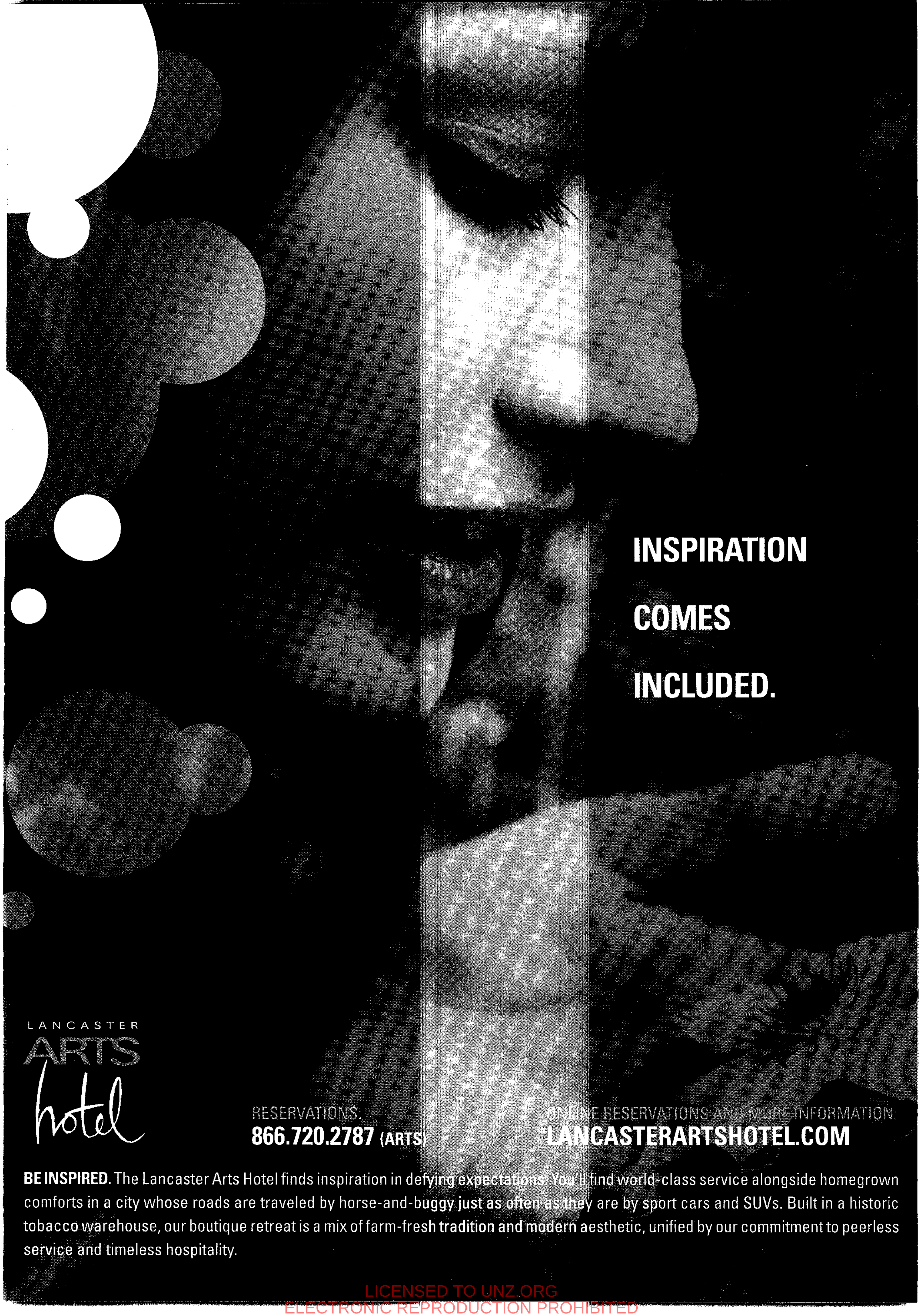

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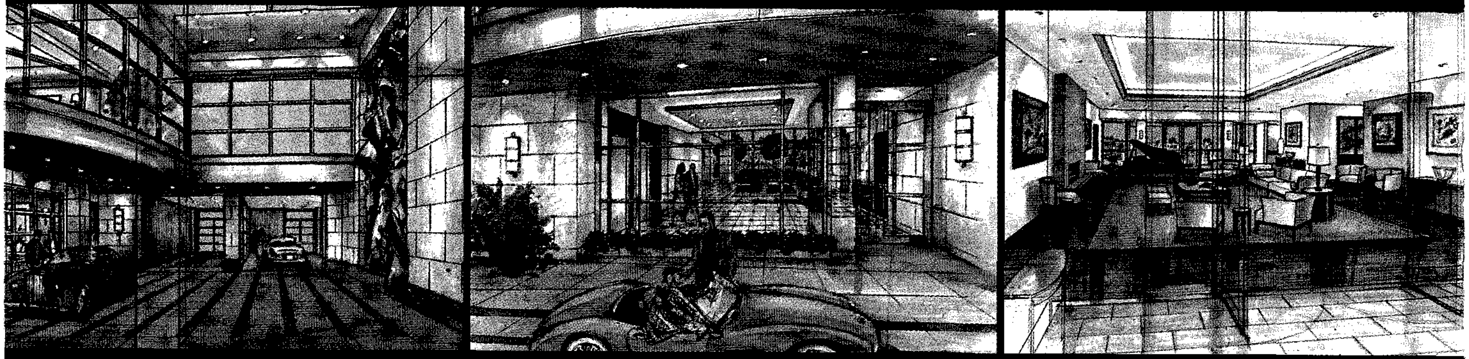

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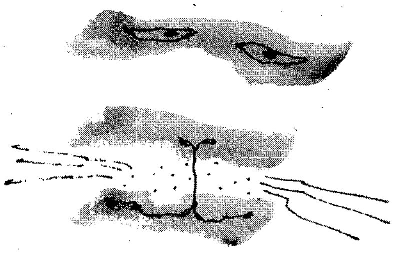
BRIEFLY NOTED

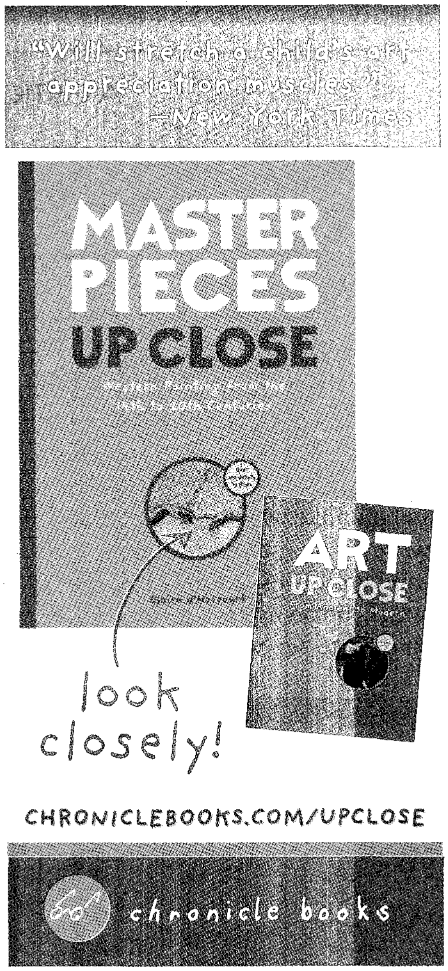
Chicken with Plums, *by Marjane Satrapi, translated from the French by Anjali Singh (Pantheon; $16.95).* The writer and illustrator who chronicled her childhood in the best-selling graphic memoir "Persepolis" now turns to the life of her great-uncle Nasser Ali Khan. A revered musician, he takes to his bed and refuses sustenance after his frustrated wife breaks his *tar*—an Iranian lute—over her knee. It takes him eight days to die, and in that time Satrapi reveals the futures of his children and unearths his past. She shows her great-uncle not merely as a wayward romantic but as a conflicted man whose story embodies several aspects of Iranian cultural identity during the late nineteen-fifties. Satrapi's deceptively simple, remarkably powerful drawings match the precise but flexible prose she employs in adapting to her multiple roles as educator, folklorist, and grand-niece.

The Blue Taxi, *by N. S. Köenings (Little, Brown; $23.99).* Köenings's début novel, set in a fictional East African city in the nineteen-seventies, centers on Sarie Turner, a lumpish, naïve Belgian woman married to a British former clerk living off his uncle's beneficence. After she witnesses a bus accident in which a Muslim boy's leg is severed, she and her young daughter visit the boy's home, where she meets his father, Majid, a widower and a failed poet. Their ensuing affair liberates Sarie from her sheltered existence and Majid from his bereavement. Köenings skillfully weaves together the stories of individuals from disparate cultures converging in a city that is entering a new era of political independence, but the characters display a frustrating inertia, and this sleepwalking quality is compounded by Köenings's fondness for indulgent, at times fanciful description.



Love and Louis XIV, *by Antonia Fraser (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday; $32.50).* Adelaide of Savoy, a favorite companion of Louis XIV during his dotage, remarked, "Under a king, a country is really ruled by women." Fraser's history of the court of the Sun King, seen through the lens of the women closest to him, is a highly readable confection, and unfolds as a sequence of cameos. There is Queen Anne of Austria, Louis's steely mother and regent, who carefully molded the infant King into an Apollo adored by the court; and his wife, Marie-Thérèse of Spain, who gave him no trouble except by dying. Then comes a trio of mistresses: Louise de La Vallière, who became a nun as recompense for her sins; Athénaïs, voluptuous and fecund; and Madame de Maintenon, the discreet and redoubtable confidante of his later years. With vivid wit, Fraser demonstrates that within the edifice of the monarchy there were deep crannies of ordinary affection.

Stealing the General, *by Russell S. Bonds (Westholme; $29.95).* On April 12, 1862, twenty Union soldiers in disguise boarded a train in Georgia to execute a scheme that was meant to bring a quick end to the Civil War. The plan, devised by a quinine-smuggling Union scout and an astronomer turned general, was to steal a locomotive and drive it to Chattanooga, capturing a key railroad connection whose loss would cut the Confederacy in half. The raid might have succeeded if not for the train's conductor, who pursued the hijackers on foot ("this seemed to be funny to some of the crowd," he said later, "but it wasn't so to me") and then by handcar and a series of three engines. The Union men were captured, and eight were hung as spies; some of the survivors were later the first-ever recipients of the Medal of Honor. The chase became a contemporary legend—it's now best known as the basis of a Buster Keaton film—and Bonds's account, the first major study in decades, is thoroughly worthy of an expedition that, a Union officer wrote, "had the wildness of a romance."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A CRITIC AT LARGE

STREET LIFE

Jerry Shore's New York, and ours.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

We see New York, and sometimes, as Henry James asked us to, we "do it"—explore and conquer it—but what we see when we see it is so far unlike what we experience when we're doing it that the difference itself can become a subject for art. The city sneaks up on us in pictures, and we are startled to see what it looks like even when what it looks like is just us, doing what we really do. We respond to truthful depictions of New York with the same surprise that we feel when we hear a recording of our own voice.

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Shore, the Atget of the parked car, was drawn to the city at its most unglamorous.

This surprise is one of the subjects of the extraordinary, lost—or, actually, never found in the first place—American photographer Jerry Shore. Shore did New York, was done by it, and then became a kind of artist-martyr to the act of seeing it. In the last decade of his life, Shore, after twenty years as one of the leading short-form commercial directors of his time, fell down a well of alcohol and isolation. He died in 1994, at the age of fifty-nine, and left behind four thousand photographic prints, most of New York City streets, in Queens and Manhattan, in Turtle Bay and Chelsea and the old meatpacking district. Only one of them had ever been sold. The collector Daniel Wolf bought all of Shore's work, in 1995, and has archived it, so that, for the first time, it is possible to see the range and intensity of what he accomplished, and discover an original New York eye.

Jerry Shore's story is simple, in many ways typical, and in most ways sad. He grew up in Oxford Circle, a lower-middle-class Jewish neighborhood outside Philadelphia, and, along with his twin brother, Fred, attended art schools at a time when Philadelphia had a great many of them. "He loved art," Fred says. "He just lived everything visual." He came to New York in the early sixties, like so many others, intending to become a painter—he worshipped de Kooning and Hofmann and Kline.

But he loved, too, the burgeoning realist and documentary cinema—his brother recalls that he had a special passion for Rossellini and Antonioni—and he soon found work with the director Harold Becker, who was then making documentary films. Together they made a seminal short film about the great French photographer Eugène Atget, who wandered the unpopulated streets of Paris with a huge camera, searching for images of the city that endured and the city that was disappearing. The Becker-Shore film is a beautiful fifteen minutes, silent save for Satie's plangent "Gymnopédie No. 1" (not nearly the cliché that it later became), with slow, floating pans of Atget's photographs of empty Paris streets and bridges and parks. It is lovely and sad enough to soften the heart of any lover of Paris, and oddly premonitory of the city views that Shore later did alone, in the same key but on a very different instrument.

Shore found himself as a filmmaker, and for a while he became one of the most successful of the swinging generation of commercial directors, at a time when the thirty-second spot was, if not exactly a theatre of creativity, at least a medium of riches and excitement. In 1969, after doing advertising work alongside Bert Stern and Jerry Bruckheimer, he opened his own shop, Jerry Shore Productions, and for the next fifteen years he was one of the most commercial of commercial directors. He made thirty- and sixty-second spots for Pepsi, Revlon, Maybelline. He was known for his lighting, his ability to make a seemingly improvised situation glamorous. Inevitably, like his contemporaries Jerry Schatzberg and Stern, he went off to Hollywood, where he made a couple of little features, including an adaptation of a Flannery O'Connor short story.

Desires are eternal, but their biddings are temporal; when Shore returned to New York, in the eighties, he found that the advertising industry had grown beyond the small, hip shops that had been dominant a decade earlier. Work suddenly became very hard

COURTESY DANIEL WOLF, INC.

to find, and his search for it was not helped by his drinking and depression. Friends say that he lost confidence, as can happen quickly to a man caught up in a confidence game.

Yet this was the moment when he gave himself over to a project that he may have begun sometime earlier, in the late seventies. He travelled through Manhattan and Queens, making large-scale, exquisitely printed color photographs of some of the most aesthetically unpersuasive streets in New York City. For the next ten years, until his death, he pursued this project, with a focus and self-discipline made all the more moving by his ever more distressed circumstances.

Some colleagues who thought they knew him well didn't even know that he was taking photographs, though on rare occasions he asked friends to accompany him. He would dress, they recall, in an unchanging daily uniform: worn bomber jacket, flannel shirt, khakis, and saddle shoes. For all his personal disorganization, he was able to handle his work with extraordinary care and methodical purpose: he roved the streets with a 35-mm. camera, "sketching" possible scenes in the least pictured vistas of the city. Then, later in the week, he would return and be ready to make his picture, waiting for the right light—the pregnant, rather than the decisive, moment—to take and keep a city corner that no one else might have thought worth preserving. The project, which seems to have begun as a kind of surcease from his commercial work—a way of recapturing some of the concerns and obsessions that had led him to New York and to art in the first place—soon became a substitute. It was all he did; given the number of images he left behind, he must have been out with his camera, hunting scenes and taking pictures, nearly every day until he died.

Shore's photography is, to use the ever-reductive language of art criticism, an attempt to reconcile the subject matter of the New York school of black-and-white street photography of the fifties—the love of the overlooked, the stray, the strange, the gutter, and the slummy—with the high finish and compositional poise of the Meyerowitz-Eggleston school of color photography. His own ambitions for his photographs seem to have been almost purely formal and even abstract: though he was always on the streets, he never saw himself as a documentary street photographer, in the familiar Eugene Richards sense. His attention was devoted to space and color and form. And, to be sure, it is the organization of the pictures that first strikes one—what was called, in formalism's rosier days, their interpenetrating planes and surprising deep space.

But it's the descriptive bits of the pictures which register most strongly. Dignity opens the door to sadness. Just as each Atget façade is a study in shape and space and gleaming particulate light but is also about a Paris that was passing, or stilled, so in Shore the will to memorialize the commonplace mirrors our own sense of how things we love get lost, and can be recalled only in pictures.

Though not in pretty ones. Jerry Shore's New York is relentlessly anti-picturesque. There is scarcely a single scene in the thousands of prints he made that even remotely corresponds to anyone's idea of a pleasing or appealing New York: no slanting shadows cast by skyscrapers, nowhere the skyline seen from a distance, or the river seen from on high, no playing children or even small moments of escape in Central Park. Here are ugly scaffoldings, black plastic bags, peeling billboards, and parked cars—the things we see and choose not to know. Yet his work is not an exercise in the knowingly anti-picturesque, either: the places he chooses aren't even squalidly interesting. There is no shame to the city he sees. Unlike the New York of Richards or, indeed, Weegee, Shore's New York is relentlessly, eerily unpopulated. When people do appear, they are as anonymous as Saul Steinberg's hieroglyphic rubber-stamp people.

Shore loved the bleakest of New York streets—not the ones, like some in the South Bronx or on the old Lower East Side, that have been romantically ruined but the grim and indifferent avenues of the postwar middle-class boom. Not mean streets but boring streets: the streets around his own apartment, for instance, in one of the giant postwar apartment buildings on

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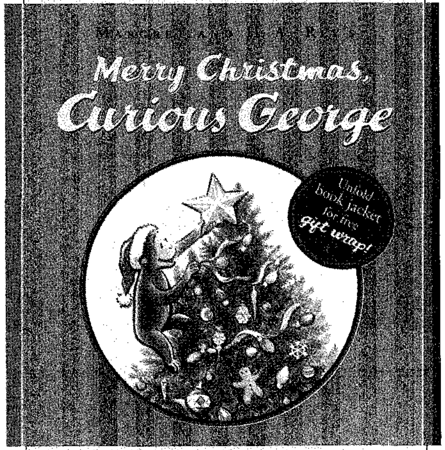
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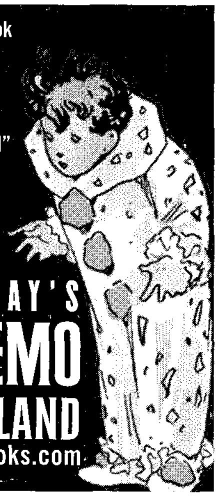

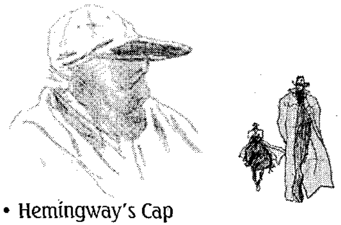

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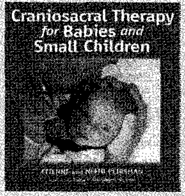

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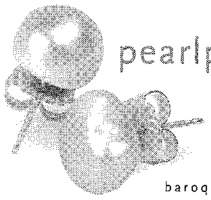

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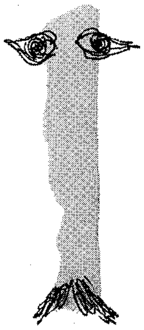
Third Avenue in the Thirties. Or the streets of Long Island City, those nameless avenues with high numbers and delivery trucks rumbling down them; he loved, too, the streets around Gansevoort Market, in the old meatpacking district, in those days resolutely unglamorous. Yet a city, so recognizable that sight alone becomes a kind of love, is opened up before us in these pictures. The peeling billboards and the plastic bags are all registered, as a camera can register things, neither as subjects, made emotional by the artist's will, nor as objects, emptied of meaning at the artist's whim. They're just *there*, as uncontroversial as crabgrass.



Shore was the Atget of the parked car. He did with parked cars what the Parisian photographer did with park benches: he made them not symbolic but merely present. His photographs are filled with their simple weight and presence. Nothing is more omnipresent in New York than those silent cars in rows and rows on city streets and lots—nothing would seem to a Martian more integral to the look of New York. Yet they are a part of our landscape that we not only reject but ride right by. We don't even think of them as ugly; we just don't know they're there, except when we rent a car and circle the block for hours, searching for a space, in sudden resentment of their hulking, stolid presence. Shore makes their presence something precise and quietly haunting. They're our homes, waiting for us as patiently as soldiers' wives.

Shore had an original sense of color, and he didn't mind playing with his realities to bring it home. Almost every Shore photograph is organized around a bright panel or pole of red—a distinctively New York red, not a sunset or a tropical red but an emergency-call-box or fire-station or athletic-socks red. (He seems to have carried a paint can of the red he liked with him; some inauspicious walls suddenly appear covered with it.) But mostly he found it where he went looking for it: the Shore red appears on diners and aluminum siding and, above all, in ads on lampposts and walls and bits of scrap metal and the signs on Texaco stations. This red is often set off by a strong taxicab or raincoat yellow, and the two together, like the panels of colors that overlay Hofmann's painterly backgrounds, give clarity and bracing organization to the gray-and-steel-blue city behind.

He had an exquisite regard for found signage: his photographs, like Walker Evans's, are filled with fading painted signs. This obsession is a kind of memento mori for the advertising by which he had found his fortune and lost his way. But it has even more to do with the simple love of the palimpsest of New York: the way that everything just sits together, old and new, ugly and lovely, the tiny superintending tip of the Chrysler Building and the vast desert of black surfaces and plastic bags flitting like tumbleweed below. The democratic funkiness of New York's streets has seldom been seen with so stoic and accepting an eye.

Shore's pictures are really still-lifes more than landscapes, studies of things rather than impressions of climates. There is a moment of aesthetic shock in Shore's unaesthetic photographs that comes when we say to ourselves, Oh, dear, it does look like that. Neither more squalid nor more picturesque but . . . just like that. The sense of things ugly in themselves—ugliness registered not defiantly but passively, as if nothing could be truly ugly—filled his work. In the best sense, it is very period, very "seventies"; he often seems within hailing distance of the photo-realist painter Richard Estes in his love of the city street as it is, not as we would have it. And at times he is within hailing distance of Edward Hopper, whose lonely avenues he updates and reimagines. There is even a Shore that seems to be a subtle comment on Hopper: sad light on lonely buildings. But then that's where he lived. James Thurber thought that every New Yorker is a mouse living in a cage in a prison; the mouse thinks it's the only one who's cooped up. In the isolation of his own peculiar island, Shore saw the shape of our imprisonment, where the bars on the cell keeping us in are hard to distinguish from the shapes on the window luring us out. ♦

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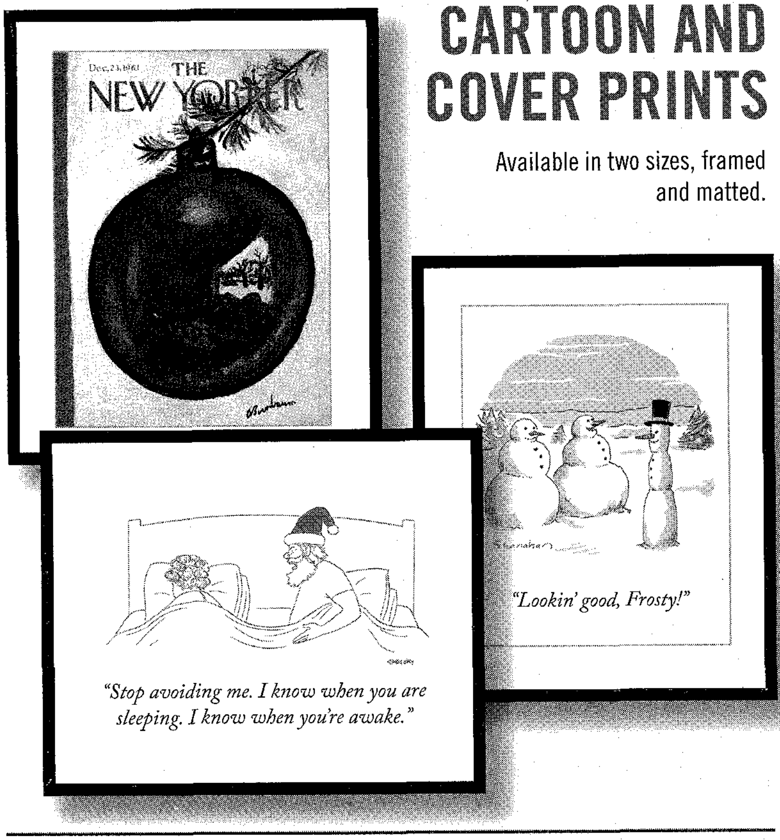
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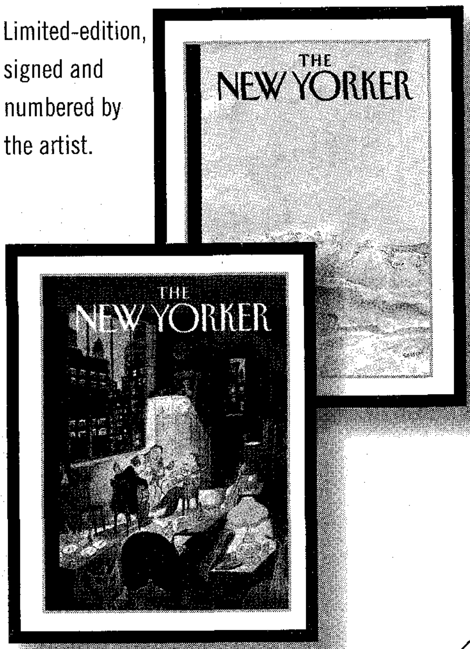
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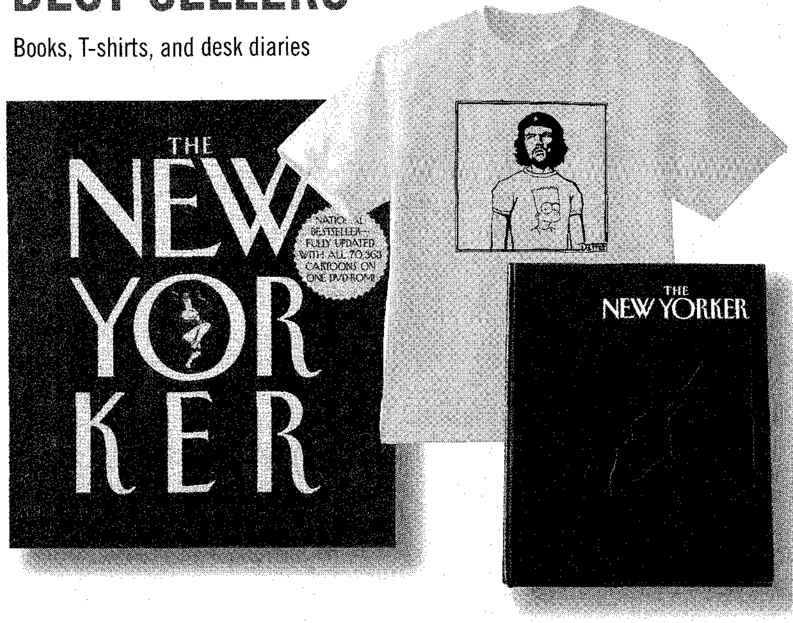
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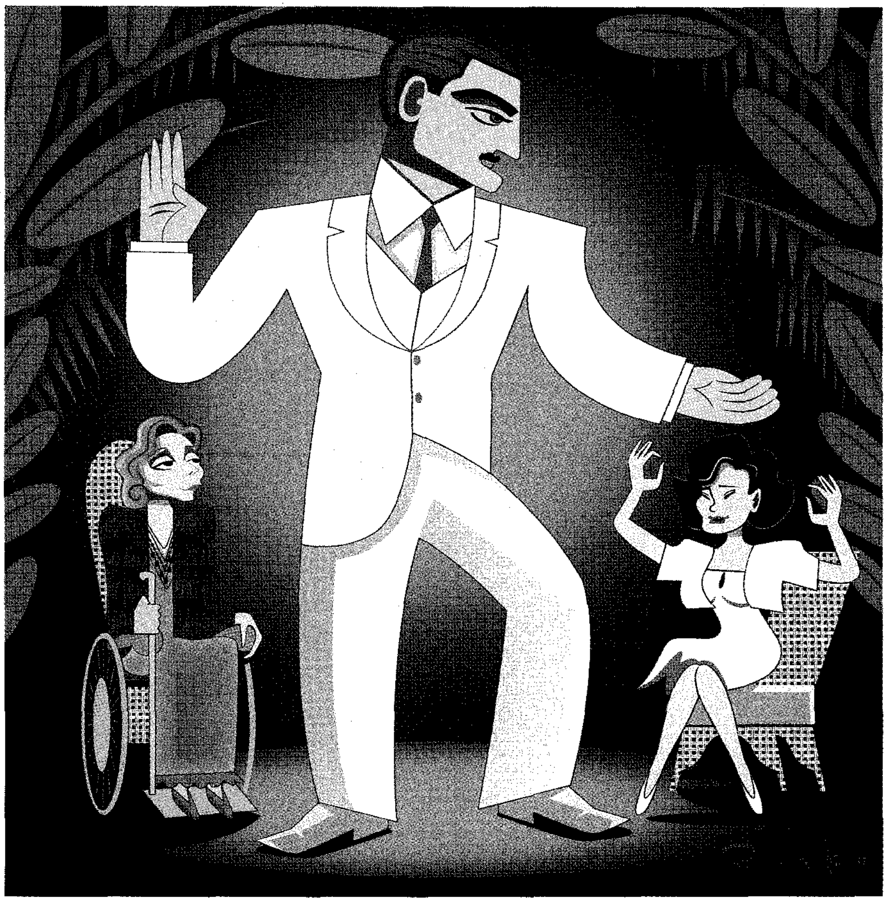
Tennessee Williams's garden of evil.

BY HILTON ALS

Among modern playwrights, Tennessee Williams is unique in his fascination with the botanical world. Serafina, the heroine of his 1951 play "The Rose Tattoo," thinks of her love as "a rose of the world." And in his 1961 play "The Night of the Iguana," reptiles and similarly scaly humans slither in and out of the hot, wet flora of coastal Mexico, looking for love or denying it. Between those two plays, Williams wrote a number of others, but none was so full of chlorophyll as his 1958 one-act "Suddenly Last Summer," now in a strong revival by the Roundabout Theatre Company (at the Laura Pels).



Blythe Danner, Gale Harold, and Carla Gugino in "Suddenly Last Summer."

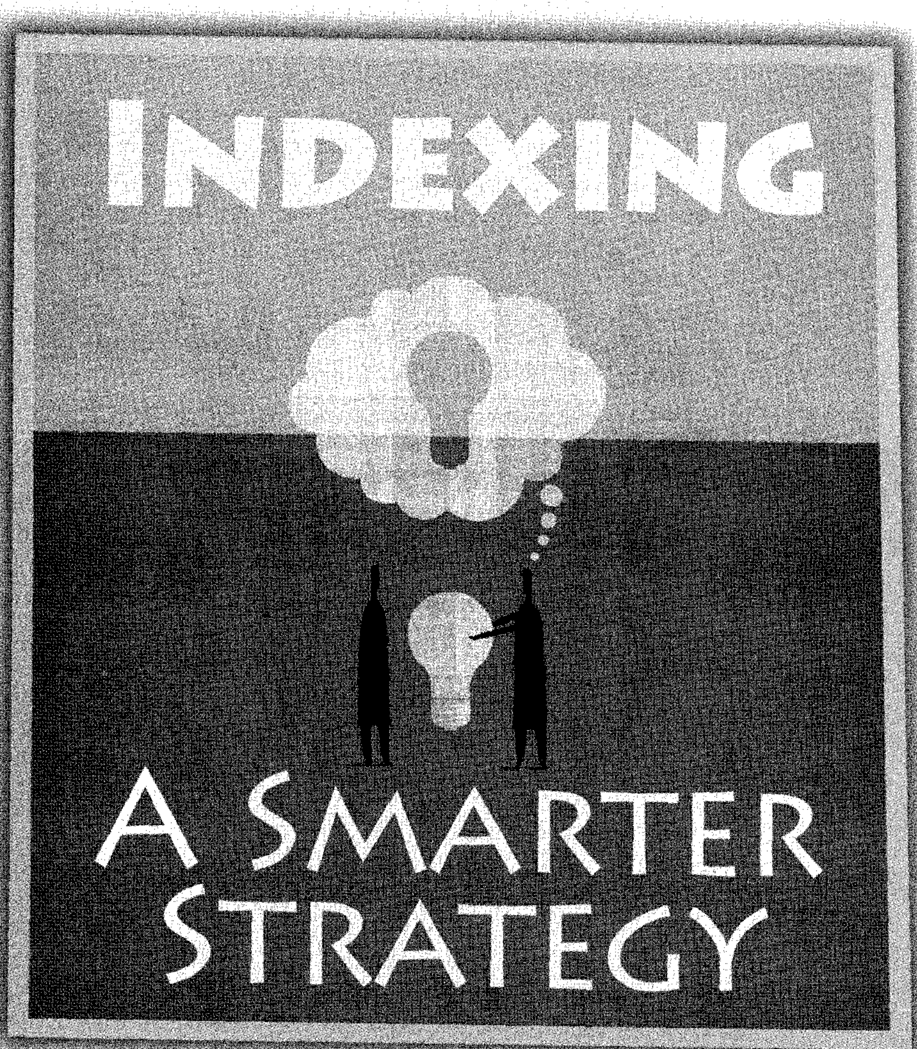
ROBERT RISKO

The play takes place a few years before America entered the Second World War (and Williams's beloved older sister, Rose, underwent one of the country's first lobotomies), in New Orleans's Garden District, in an elaborate garden, which Williams describes as "a tropical jungle, or forest, in the prehistoric age of giant fern-forests." Who is tending this mannered plot now that its owner, the poet Sebastian Venable, is dead? Why, his mother, Violet (Blythe Danner), naturally, who treats it as something of a shrine—or a lair. Resting lightly on her cane (she recently had a stroke, which she will not acknowledge as such), with her fingernails painted tulip red, Violet, despite her infirmity—or, perhaps, because of it—flirts with a young man who has come to pay a call: Dr. Cukrowicz (Gale Harold), whose last name, he says, means "sugar" in Polish. Violet's words drip like honey as she reveals her goal: to have Dr. Sugar lobotomize her niece, Catharine Holly (Carla Gugino), who, according to Violet, won't stop "babbling" about Sebastian's death. Once Dr. Sugar has performed the operation, she promises, she will write a much needed check to fund his research.

The trouble began, it seems, the summer before, when Violet was too ill to accompany Sebastian on his annual trip abroad, so he took Catharine, his beautiful young cousin, instead. While they were in Europe, Sebastian died. The details surrounding his death—as recounted by Catharine, in a long, alternately beautiful and overwrought monologue—are intolerable to Violet, who had turned a cloudy eye to her son's avaricious sexual nature, and to the way he made use of her to procure his clandestine consumptions.

The word "melodrama" originally meant a stage play incorporating music. But very few actresses understand the musical nature of Williams's dense language—the notes that are piled high and then higher, until they threaten to strain the voice and the nerves with their demand for pure feeling. More than one actress has succumbed to the unadulterated surface hysteria of Williams's prose. When Elizabeth Ashley took on Violet in the 1995 Broadway production of the play, she went for the broad strokes and not the tremolo underneath, playing the fading old woman as though she were the Venus flytrap at the center of the garden which Sebastian tended with love and disgust.

Danner, on the other hand, understands that she must keep Violet grounded, making her as real a "monster woman" (as Gore Vidal referred to Williams's female friends) as possible. She plays Violet as a tease in iron petticoats, a stage mother whose primary audience—her exquisite, refined, educated son—has left her to a world of pernicious fools. She hesitates to impart bad news, then issues commands with the vocal force of an admiral during inspection. She lingers over the arc of Williams's words, pausing at the top of any given speech, then sliding down, breathless but in control. Danner's brilliant performance as Alma Winemiller in the 1976 television version of Williams's "Eccentricities of a Nightingale" remains unparalleled in its interpretation of the sadness and hope in the heart of an em-



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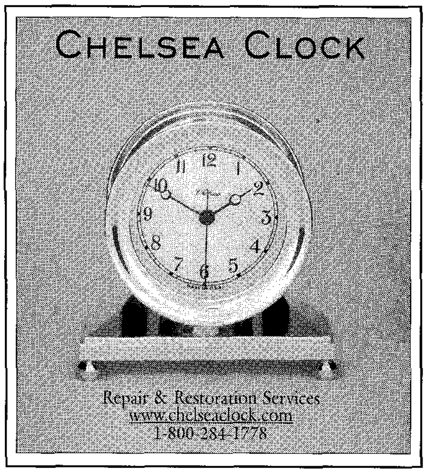

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battled romantic, largely because Danner didn't treat the words with reverence; she saw past the filigree to the character's tragic reality.

Danner's refusal to be intimidated by the text has inspired other players; here it influences Gugino, who is a fine actress in her own right. Her all-out, nuanced performance highlights the intellectual content of the play—its excoriation of the bored, cannibalistic rich as they visit countries that they believe they own. ("That's how he talked about people, as if they were items on a menu," Catharine recalls of her cousin. " 'That one is appetizing,' or 'That one is not appetizing.' ") The director, Mark Brokaw, underlines how Catharine and her mother (played with just the right degree of fluttery greediness by Becky Ann Baker) are the inverse of Violet and Sebastian. The only difference is money: the rich can reorder the world with cash, while the poor can only witness the destruction. Among the other interpretative highlights that Brokaw offers is the notion of Catharine and Sebastian's twinship. Both born in rotten gardens, Sebastian escaped his by courting death, while Catharine—a fighter, blind to anything but the truth—takes a verbal axe to her subterranean roots.

If "Mary Poppins" (at the New Amsterdam) is about anything at all, it's extravagance. More than two and a half hours long, and with thirty musical numbers bursting with choreography by the energetic Matthew Bourne, Richard Eyre's "Mary Poppins" overloads the senses to such a degree that you stumble out of the theatre in a daze, uncertain whether you have had a theatrical experience or a bag of Cheetos and a Big Gulp. This is as it should be—certainly if you are a child, which, one assumes, is this Disney-produced show's target audience. Getting kids into a theatre is tough nowadays. Not only is the director up against such stay-at-home distractions as PlayStations and DVDs but, once he *does* get the kids in there, he must be clever enough to sneak language and narrative into their largely visual way of thinking. To make this particular dramaturgical medicine go down, Eyre coats the entire production with spoonfuls of sugar.

And we consume the empty calories gladly, not least because Eyre is a showman who means to make a success of a story that has always been somewhat fuzzy, at least on a moral level. After reading the P. L. Travers books or seeing the 1964 film version, starring Julie Andrews, we wonder if Mary Poppins makes the children she cares for better people by being, as she sings near the start of this show, "practically perfect," or if she's a Pied Piper-like fantasist who preys on her charges' escapist wishes. Is it all about her or all about the emotionally transformative effects of love? Unfortunately, the question isn't answered, or even raised, in Julian Fellowes's script for this show. And the digressions we do encounter seem only to get in the way of Eyre's sleek vision for the story. Do we really need to know that Mr. Banks (Daniel Jenkins), a cold, officious banker, was denied a happy childhood by his distant, unloving nanny? Or that Mrs. Banks (Rebecca Luker) is overwhelmed by his remoteness? These naturalistic touches do not advance the show. Instead, the brief scenes devoted to such grownup complications as trouble at the office and the secrets of the maternal heart distract us with thoughts of what "Mary Poppins" could have been: a smaller, more intense study of life's disappointments.

Subtlety of vision has never been a hallmark of Disney, and Eyre knows that. He is intelligent enough to divert us from the darker bits with, among other things, a phenomenal, constantly moving set, designed by Bob Crowley (who also took charge of the costumes): scrims and sets fly miraculously into the rafters, only to be replaced by others whenever Poppins (Ashley Brown) has a change of mood. Dressed in the familiar flat hat and low-heeled boots, Brown's Poppins bears enough of a sartorial resemblance to Andrews's iconic version that the audience is with her before she even opens her mouth. That she sings well, and sparkles even better, just reinforces our favorite image of turn-of-the-century England: a "practically perfect" land of tea and crumpets and rosy cheeks, where everyone is always on the brink of celebrating Christmas. At no point does this Mary Poppins get her hands dirty in a sinkful of Dickensian dishwater. Eyre is to be commended for intimating that, at some time in her life, she might have. But if he had been inclined to show those unpleasantnesses he wouldn't have been asked to direct this musical in the first place. ♦

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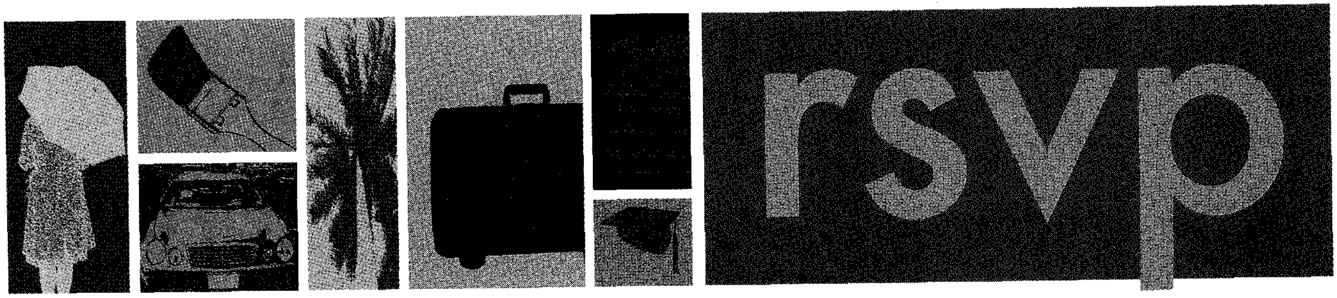

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THE ART WORLD

QUEEN OF ARTS

A retrospective of Kiki Smith at the Whitney.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Great artists work from and for history, where no one lives. Kiki Smith, the subject of a tangy retrospective at the Whitney, "Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005," works from and for the moment, shared by everybody. She is a major figure—long the leading light of communally minded downtown avant-gardes—who makes minor art. Her sculpture, drawings, and prints betoken general concepts and generic sentiments; however striking, their form is arbitrary. The best known illustrate carnal facts and poetic associations of the human body. Take, for example, a wall-hung iron rendition of the digestive system (1988); a floor piece of swarming crystal sperm (1989-90); and "Virgin Mary" (1992), a life-size, reverently postured female figure, in beeswax, that is partly flayed, its musculature on livid display. Lately, Smith has developed a fanciful bestiary—wolves and birds, especially—with fairy-tale affinities for states of human fear and desire. "Daughter" (1999), a life-size Little Red Riding Hood made of paper, cloth, and hair, appears to be metamorphosing into a werewolf; an electronic soundtrack, by the composer Margaret De Wys, contributes appropriate growls and squeaks. Cosmic awe is a recurrent theme: lots of stars, in many shapes and mediums. Smith's works are always fiercely adept, inventive, and even elegant, but their aesthetic quality tracks, rather than transcends, her thoughts and feelings. They serve an attitude that combines a forthright desire to seduce and a mischievous will to shock.

It is tempting to say that Smith's chief creation is herself: a neo-hippie queen of bohemia and—what with her wild hair, sharp features, pale skin, and abundant little blue tattoos of rings and stars—an avatar of the Addams Family. A recent profile by Michael Kimmelman, in the *Times Magazine*, captured her charisma: "ethereal and laughing," in perpetual motion as a creator and in teeming company as a doyenne. (To not like her would require a knack for bitterness.) But Smith is a grounded product of breeding and circumstance, with nothing made up about her. She is a New York School aristocrat. Her father was the sculptor Tony Smith, a close friend of Barnett Newman, and, rather like herself, an artist whose significance exceeds the sum of his material achievements. (His commanding geometric works only partly fulfill a visionary genius that both anticipated and overleaped minimalism.) Kiki and her sisters served their father as studio assistants and grew up on easy terms with art-world celebrities. Kiki's knockabout biography—as a college dropout and, before her art-world success, a baker, electrician's assistant, surveyor, garment worker, census taker, short-order cook, and bartender—recalls bohemian eras when artists lived as lumpen proletarians, at home with the working class. The last such era involved Smith's own generation, albeit as something of a conceit: principled downward social mobility.

Smith cannot be understood except as an exemplar—and survivor—of a scene that boomed in New York in the early nineteen-eighties. That epoch of punk music, performance art, political anarchism, polymorphous sexuality, gallery graffiti, funky feminism, populist confederacies of artists (CoLab, ABC No Rio), and prevalent bad habits was done in by factors including gentrification and, above all, AIDS. The wave of death engulfed Smith's sister Beatrice and a great many friends. The catastrophe—practically forgotten in today's money-drugged, supercilious art world—fostered a movement, in the nineties, of art that marshalled political grievance. (A downturn in the art market boosted the trend, which nestled in art institutions. Choleric installational art was just the thing for a burgeoning circuit of biennial exhi-

Smith with "Lilith" (1994): her works combine a desire to seduce and a will to shock. Photograph by Ulrike Schamoni.

bitions.) Smith's maturation as an artist accorded with the moment. Already preoccupied with the body—a favorite source book was "Gray's Anatomy"—she became a bard of a suddenly sinister organic existence, with such conversation pieces as a row of huge, handsome clear glass bottles etched with names, in Gothic lettering, of our now possibly lethal secretions: semen, mucus, vomit, oil, tears, blood, milk, saliva, diarrhea, urine, sweat, and pus. I remember the impact of another version of that piece, in silvered glass, when it was shown at the Museum of Modern Art, in 1990. I was caught between nausea and hilarity, wanting to flee but transfixed and, despite myself, admiring.

Nerve, wit, and a quality that might be termed compassionate radicalism made Smith's audacities undismissable, and they still do. Her attitude toward physical abjection is strangely celebratory, evoking the insouciant scatology of James Joyce. (Tony Smith, a passionate Joycean, read "Ulysses" and "Finnegans Wake" to his daughters.) Add to this a rigorous virtuosity in matters of craft. Speaking of substances, the mediums of works at the Whitney include oil, acrylic, watercolor, photography, ink, bronze, wood, fabric, plaster, rubber stamps, terra cotta, thread, nails, porcelain, string, papier-mâché, human hair, sheep's wool, blood, silver, aluminum, wire, silicon, polyester resin, pewter, gold leaf, feathers, enamel, video, Plexiglas, graphite, marble dust, silver nitrate, and rubies. Each material is handled with a consummate savoir-faire that would pass muster with professional artisans, many of whom Smith regularly consults. Her multitudinous forms of picture-making, statuary, relief, collage, and assemblage—mounted on walls, occupying plinths or pedestals, displayed in vi-

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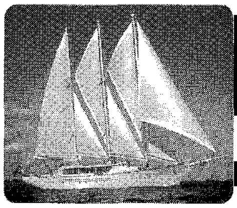

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trines, laid on the floor, or hung from the ceiling—are reliably cogent on their own terms. Taken together, they suggest the program of a post-minimalist Beaux-Arts academy.

In a way, Smith creates nothing but tours de force: one-of-a-kind coups of an indefinite style that has no consistent middle range. Few fully elude an air of ad-hoc caprice. One that does is "Lilith" (1994), a dark bronze, with glass eyes, of a naked, witchy woman clinging, flylike, to a wall, in an upside-down crouch. Its likely message—feminist menace, more or less—is completely subsumed in its aesthetic power. More usually, your attention ricochets from one not quite plenary work to the next. There is a plausible virtue in this. The soul of Smith's artistry is not in things made but in the fascination of making them. We stand at her shoulder, in effect, and observe the process of decisions, about form and nuance, that are never less than adroit. It seems strange to say this of an artist who is given to gross and sentimental subject matter, but Smith has tremendous taste.

Smith told Kimmelman that she likes to be surrounded by friends while she works, "so that you get the benefit of everyone's opinions and so it's not just about you in your you-dom." Notions of communitarian creativity aren't new—they surface in periodic fashions, such as the hippie tribalism of the sixties and the identity politics of the nineties—but their premise remains ineffaceably radical in Western culture. We still and, I think, always will like to tinker up canons of greatness. These require reference to the him- or her-dom of individuals who, in ways specific to their times and themselves, alter standard histories of ideas and mediums. Smith represents a contrary standard, with jolting vigor. Her self-uncentered art keeps faith not only with friends and not just with a generation of fellow-adventurers that has been subject to ruinous attrition; she dedicates her skills to the expression of essentially anonymous thoughts and fantasies, which might be entertained by anyone of her place and time. The secrets of her persistence are hardheaded humility and nonchalant fatalism. (An early watercolor of trees, bugs, and felled bodies bears the chipper assurance "Nature doesn't care if you become fly food.") You may choose to ignore her impertinent art, but you know what? She doesn't care. ♦

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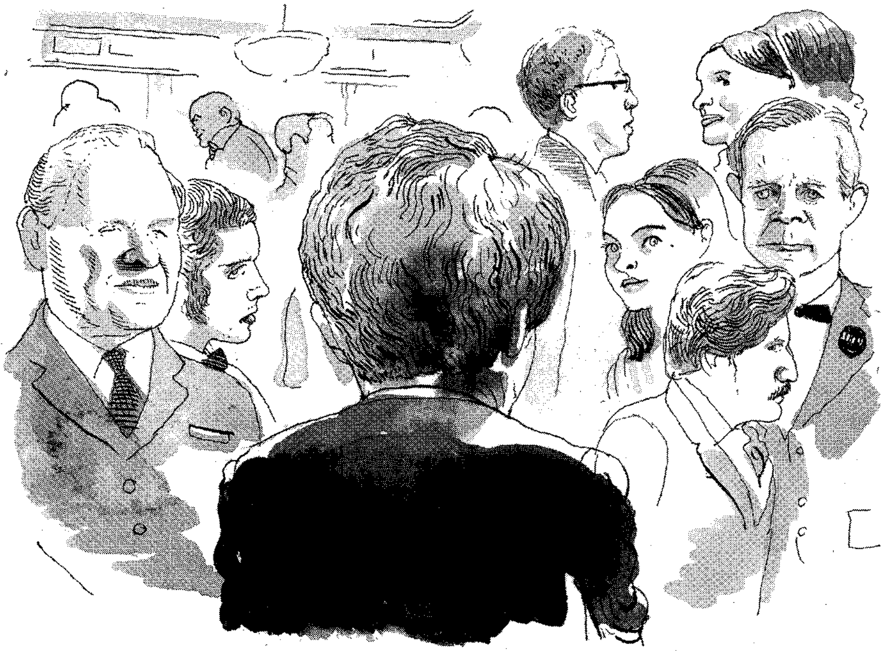
LIBERAL EDUCATION

"Bobby," "Fast Food Nation," and "The History Boys."

BY DAVID DENBY

It's nice that liberals win elections now and then, but I'm not sure they should be allowed to make movies. Two new pictures, "Bobby" and "Fast Food Nation," inspired by the most humane sympathies, and outfitted with impeccably progressive attitudes—no one could disagree with a single notion in either film—are pretty much a trial to sit through.



Emilio Estevez's film about Robert Kennedy squeezes its celebrity cast for pathos.

BARRY BLITT

Emilio Estevez's "Bobby" is an imagining of everything that might have happened in the old Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles on June 4, 1968, the day that Senator Robert F. Kennedy won the California primary, and during the early hours of June 5th, when he was assassinated in the hotel's kitchen. Estevez has attempted a kind of political version of "Grand Hotel," the Greta Garbo–John Barrymore kitsch classic from 1932, in which many glamorous people swirl into the lobby of a deluxe Berlin establishment and trip across one another's destinies. In "Bobby," the Senator is seen in newsreels and, occasionally, from the rear, as a figure moving through the hotel. Yet the film is devoted not to him but to such things as the marital difficulties of the hotel's hair stylist and its manager (Sharon Stone and William H. Macy), the soft meanderings in the lobby of two retired gents (Anthony Hopkins and Harry Belafonte), the psychedelic misadventures of a pair of truant campaign workers (Brian Geraghty and Shia LaBeouf) who get turned on by a blissed-out dealer (Ashton Kutcher), and many other little tales, starring Estevez himself, Demi Moore, Christian Slater, Heather Graham, Martin Sheen, Helen Hunt, Elijah Wood, and several more. The intersecting stories are meant to suggest the range of American character types, base and noble, and also the scattered impulses of vanity, fear, and idealism that Bobby Kennedy, who understood so much of the country's discord in 1968, might have reconciled and harmonized in a Presidential campaign. The movie says, "He was all of us; he could have healed us." But, of course, he wasn't, and, very likely, he couldn't have.

Estevez has made a vague gesture at a

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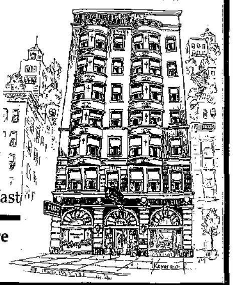

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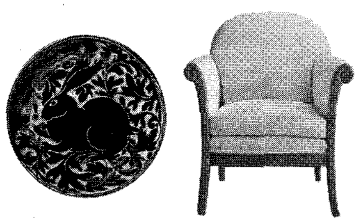

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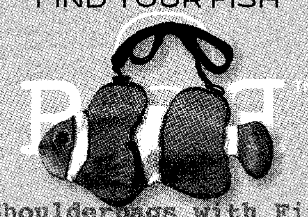

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large, metaphoric structure without having the dramatic means to achieve it. His choreography of the panic and misery in the hotel after the shooting is impressive, and some of the actors do fine in their brief roles. But his script never rises above earnest banality, and we are constantly being taught little lessons in tolerance and humanity: Laurence Fishburne, as a sous-chef channelling Martin Luther King, Jr., exudes calm wisdom in a dispute with a Latino kitchen employee; Lindsay Lohan, marrying a boy she barely knows in order to keep him out of combat, is wide-eyed and trusting. The practice of casting a gang of well-known actors in tiny parts can be fun if the actors do something witty, but Estevez squeezes them for pathos and heartbreak. Didn't anyone tell him that you can't throw a celebrity-movie party around such an event as an assassination? The triviality of the device doesn't match the seriousness of the subject. As it happens, I saw Kennedy address a largely Latino crowd in San Jose the week of the primary. He was great that night, both princely and warm, and, for anyone who heard him in those final days, the movie will recall his powers of empathy and moral alertness. In 1968, he was a young man with a not always honorable past and some marvellous new instincts; he was smart, calculating, at times melancholy, at times optimistic. But he was essentially unfinished. Robert Kennedy was fascinating, yet there's something peculiarly naïve and even desperate about clinging to the tentative possibilities that he held out as the quality of hope that has eluded us for almost forty years.

Eric Schlosser's 2001 book, "Fast Food Nation," was a scathing look at the way that McDonald's, Burger King, and the other chains have afflicted the culture and morale, as well as the diet and health, of this country. The fiction that Schlosser and the director Richard Linklater have extracted from the book is a mess, with narrative lines that go astray or simply wind up in the air, and sizable blocks of verbal exposition in which one character or another holds forth on the sins of the meatpackers or of the restaurants themselves. The most important plot line concerns some attractive young Mexicans who cross the border illegally and wind up, exploited and mangled, in a huge slaughterhouse in Cody, Colorado. The scenes of the abattoir are dismaying in the tradition of Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle," but the movie is halfhearted, fragmentary, unachieved. Both "Bobby" and "Fast Food Nation" were conceived at a moment, perhaps, when liberals were unable to tell stories, so deep was their despair. Looking at these screwed-up movies, even a conservative might say that it's time for liberals to pull themselves together and begin their narrative anew.

"The History Boys" is alive on the screen. The director Nicholas Hytner, who staged the original production of Alan Bennett's play for the National Theatre in London, shot the movie quickly, in five weeks during the summer of 2005, just before the play went on tour. Revved by the stage performances, the cast courses through the material with disciplined exuberance—especially the eight young actors at the center of the drama, many of whom have never appeared in a film before. A few of the early reviews complained that the movie version is no more than a filmed play, which is beside the point. Bennett's conceit is that the classroom is a theatre. In his classroom, learning is acquired as much through performance as through study; wit is a form of action, and music and poetry create and release emotions too private to be spoken. The setting is Yorkshire in the nineteen-eighties—a grammar school at which a group of eight boys, seven of them very bright, are being prepped for the mind-crushing exams that could lead to a place at Oxford or Cambridge. The eight are neither jocular aristos nor resentful proles but hardworking, solidly middle-class kids. Yet status certainly matters to them. For the boys, and for the school's ambitious headmaster, Oxbridge remains the gold standard. The question is: By what means shall they get there? By rote study? By mastering exam-taking tricks? Or by love of knowledge? For these boys, theatricality is a means to self-realization, and, for Hytner, honoring the play's artifice is the best way to get to the heart of the matter.

No actual classrooms, I imagine, have ever been as animated as these. The boys talk back to their teachers, and everyone seems familiar with the details of everyone else's private life. Inarticulateness doesn't exist; even the lone dunce explains his slowness vividly. This is what we want in a film about learning: not humdrum stammer and error but brilliant shenanigans, with everyone leaping, bodily and intellectually, around the room, and all eight students competing to be the brightest boy—that is, the best actor—in class. In part, what goes on is licensed by the unorthodox pedagogy of the movie's hero, Hector (Richard Griffiths), a portly, sixtyish English master who runs a class in General Studies. Hector teaches only one subject, poetry; the rest of his discourse is dedicated to the education of souls. Among the boys rising to Hector's challenge are the chubby clown, Timms (James Corden); the cunning, dark-eyed seducer, Dakin (Dominic Cooper), who has benevolent as well as cynical tendencies; and the smooth-cheeked Posner (Samuel Barnett), who's physically less mature than the other boys and hopelessly in love with Dakin. In the classroom, Posner sings Rodgers and Hart's "Bewitched" in a high, unbroken voice; he's like a Shakespearean boy actor offering plaintive Elizabethan ballads in the interludes between action. His unrequited love brings him close to Hector, who carries an aura of melancholy and mortality around with him. The boys adore their teacher, so they wearily put up with his habit of groping them when they ride home on the back of his motorcycle—it's merely the price of being his student. The movie is imbued with a shrugging acceptance of homosexual longing; Hector is not so much a predator as a lonely old man (he's married, sort of), and Richard Griffiths, cranky, red-faced, and eloquent, makes him a wounded humanist not quite at bay.

Hector's antagonist is a new man, the young Irwin (Steven Campbell Moore), who teaches the boys how to summarize historical periods with easy-to-remember categories and ready-made quotes. Irwin is a kind of clever highbrow trot. He acquaints the students with the power of perversity. In order to gain the attention of a tired exam-paper reader, he says, take the received wisdom and turn it inside out: make Hitler or Stalin sympathetic. Interest, in the Irwin doctrine, is more important than truth. Irwin was made for television, not for teaching, and Bennett appears to be using him to vent his disgust at hyper-articulate prime-time historians who are overly fond of clever paradox. Not that truth is a unitary and certifiable phenomenon—I don't think Bennett would say that. On the contrary, the movie advocates the limited but powerful truth-telling of poetry, as well as ordinary decency and plain speaking. Auden, Larkin, and Orwell are its gods, but only Alan Bennett could have melded the spirit of those three into an entertainment about education. If pleasure is the ultimate teacher, Bennett and his faithful director, Hytner, are superlative pedagogues. ♦

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Volume LXXXII, No. 39, November 27, 2006. The New Yorker (ISSN 0028-792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: Jan. 23 & 30, Feb. 13 & 20, July 10 & 17, Aug. 7 & 14, Dec. 25 & Jan. 1) by The Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Louis Cona, vice-president and publisher; Jamie Engel, associate publisher; Alatia Bradley, advertising director; Karen Quinn-Panzer, advertising director; Melissa McCarthy Strome, advertising director; Judy Safir, director of finance and business operations; Daniella Wells, executive director marketing & strategic planning; Janine Silvera, executive director of creative services; Jacqueline Cinguina, director of integrated marketing; Steve Porter, creative director/advertising; Ellen Reid, creative services director; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Advance Magazine Publishers Inc.: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president–human resources; John Buese, executive vice-president–chief information officer; David Orlin, senior vice-president–strategic sourcing; Robert Bennis, senior vice-president–real estate; Maurie Perl, senior vice-president–chief communications officer. Shared services provided by Advance Magazine Group: Steven T. Florio, Advance Magazine Group vice chairman; David B. Chemidlin, senior vice-president–general manager, shared services center. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. R123242885. Canada Post return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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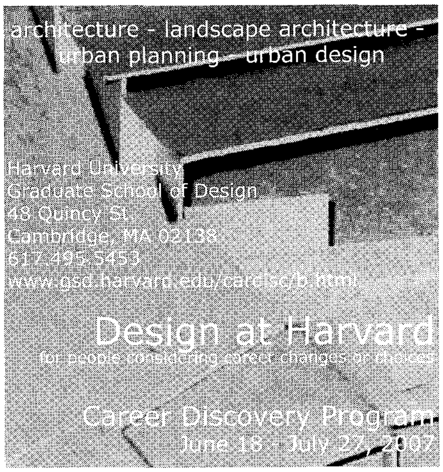

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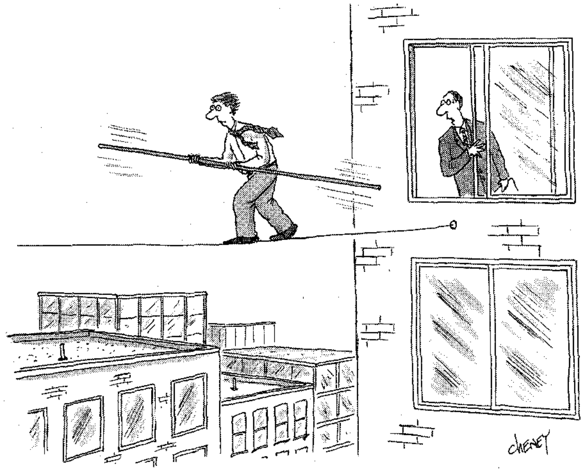
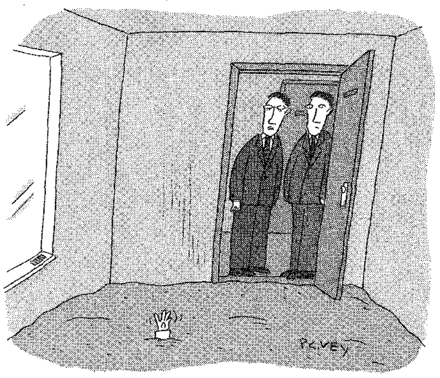
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Frank Cotham, must be received by Sunday, November 26th. Finalists in the November 13th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 11th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"And make mine a decaf."
Cheryl DiMenna, Baltimore, Md.



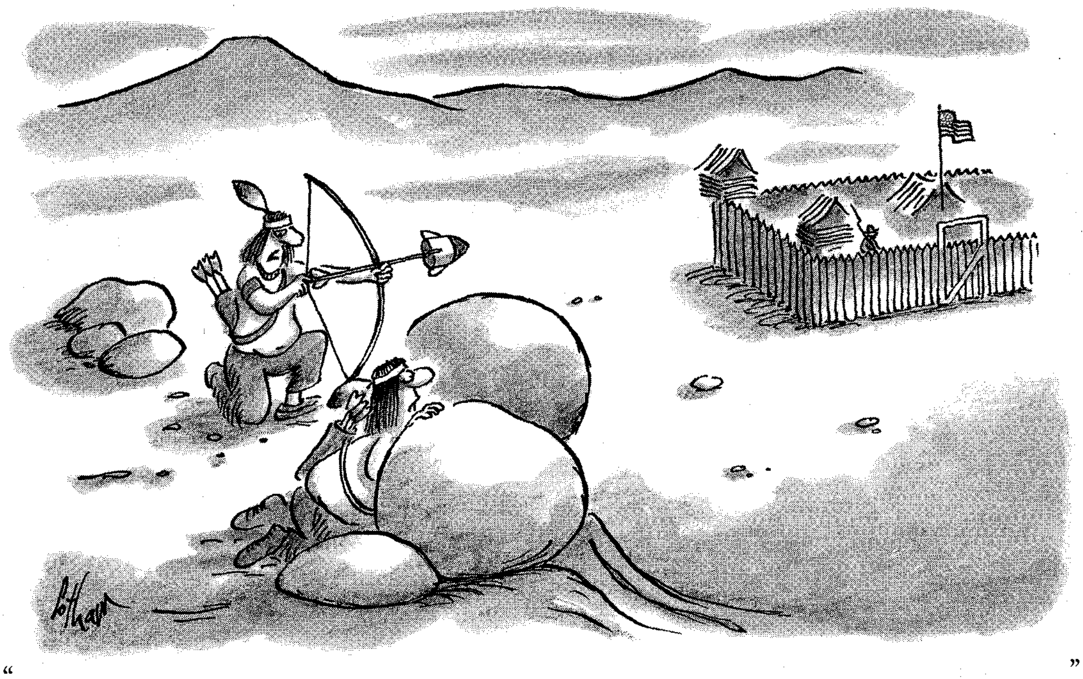
THE FINALISTS

"Of course, the current tenant will be gone before the first of the month."
Stephen Gelb, Teaneck, N.J.

"O.K. Second word, four syllables."
Kim Antieau, Stevenson, Wash.

"I thought Ferguson hated quicksand."
Dickie Harris, Chicago, Ill.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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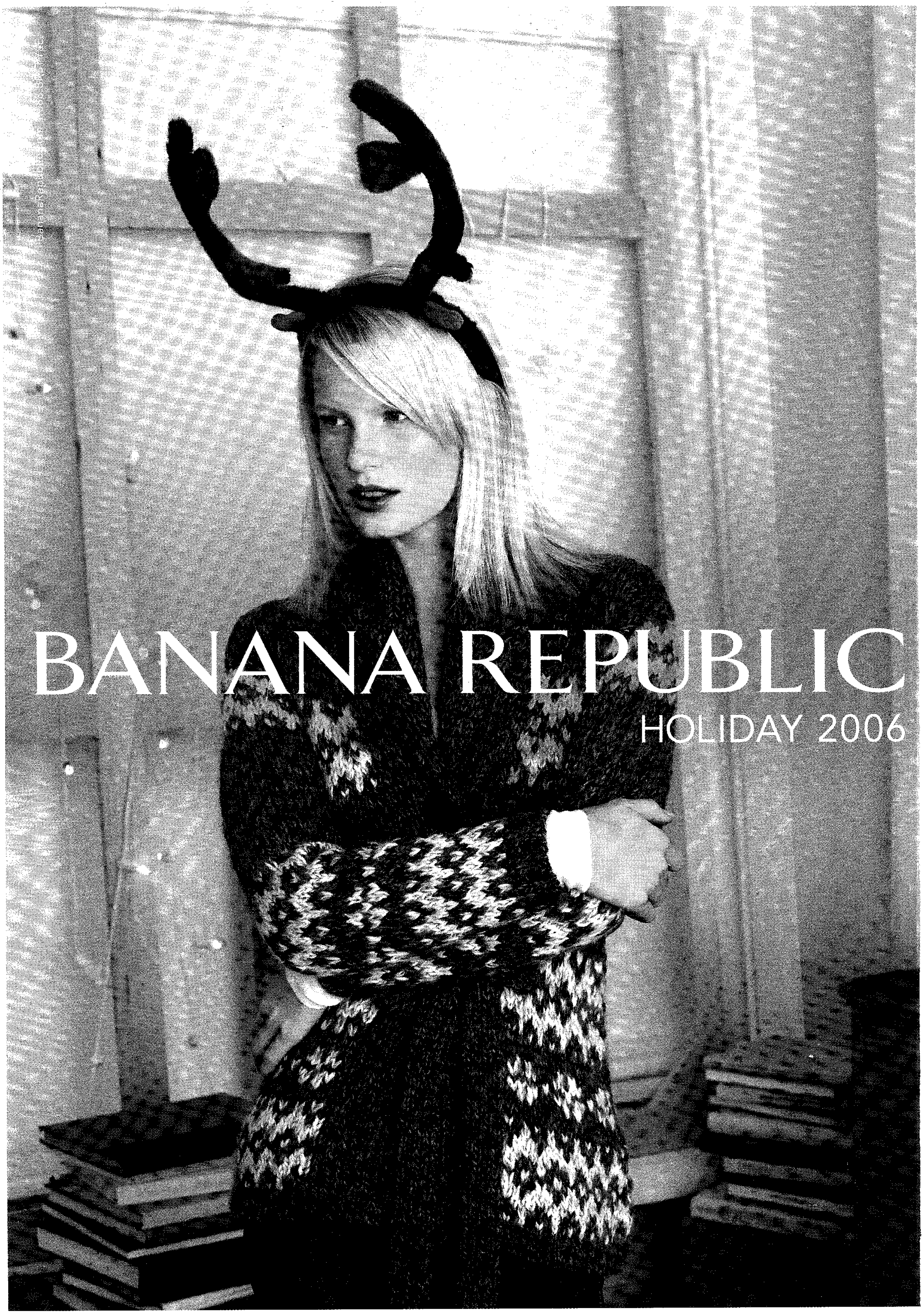
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